Constructions of Shakespeare in the secondary school curriculum

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CONSTRUCTIONS OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways in which Shakespeare is constructed historically, culturally and pedagogically as a compulsory component of the English National Curriculum.

Employing a case study framework enables the investigation to encompass a dual purpose, both exploratory and illustrative, raising open questions about ways in which four different teachers construct Shakespeare discursively and pedagogically in the classroom, yet also testing out theoretical claims made by proponents of 'active Shakespeare'. The study is situated in a wider historical and ideological framework, including an overview of educational policy since 1921 and the ways in which Shakespeare has been claimed to be of benefit in mass schooling. This research takes a multiple-case design, spanning four classrooms across two London comprehensive schools. Direct classroom observation of the teaching and reception of a set Shakespeare play, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and documentary data including student essays are analysed thematically, drawing on social constructivism as an epistemological perspective.

This thesis concludes that National Curriculum policy encourages the construction of Shakespeare as dislocated knowledge, removed from meaningful cultural processes. For many students in this case study the reading of a set Shakespeare play has been a disabling rather than a liberating experience. This thesis argues that in the context of assessment-driven critical practice, reading a Shakespeare play is likely to be reconstituted as a passive process, where meaning must be mediated by the teacher, and students' own experiences and cultural knowledge become irrelevant. Ultimately, even in classrooms where teachers attempt to construct Shakespeare pedagogically as 'active', the process of reading may remain a passive one, where Shakespeare's iconic status and the authority of the text thus remain largely intact.

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INTRODUCTION:

SHAKESPEARE SAVES THE WORLD

In one episode of the popular BBC television series, *Doctor Who,* the time-travelling Doctor and his assistant, Martha, meet Shakespeare. The plot of 'The Shakespeare Code'[1] hinges upon an alien plot to destroy the Earth. The year is 1599 and evil Carrionites (disguised as three witches) have chosen Shakespeare's Globe as the site for realising their plan because their particular science centres on the power of words. And Shakespeare, presumably as the universe's most famous wordsmith, acts as the unwitting key to their near-success. The script playfully confronts various aspects of the Shakespeare myth, particularly in a series of vignettes offering proof of Shakespeare's genius. For instance, the witches' spell designed to end the world promises that 'the mind of a genius will unlock the tide of blood'; standing on the stage of the Globe theatre, the Doctor assures Shakespeare that 'You can change people's minds with words in this place'; Shakespeare is just about the only character in the modern *Doctor Who* series (2005 -2011) not to be fooled by the Doctor's so-called psychic paper (all-purpose fake credentials, in which the reader sees what s/he expects to see). As the Doctor triumphantly exclaims to Martha, "That proves it, absolute genius!" Fittingly, in the end Shakespeare saves the world by spinning poetic words on stage, poetry that is powerful enough to force the aliens back through a portal in space.

As everyone knows, Shakespeare was indeed a genius. Most of my schooling in English was designed tacitly to acquaint me with that fact. O level, A level and degree level Literature preserved Shakespeare study as pre-eminent amongst other

[1] Written by Gareth Roberts, it was originally broadcast on BBC1, 7 April 2007

literary experiences. Even in the early twenty-first century we continue to be surrounded by emblems of Shakespeare's quintessentially British 'genius': living and working until recently in London, I frequently took the number 73 bus past the new British Library whose chosen symbol happened initially to be the face of Shakespeare; the long-running BBC radio programme, *Desert Island Discs*, famously continues to equate the complete works of Shakespeare with the Bible; writers ranging from popular best-sellers, such as Bill Bryson, to eminent Shakespeare scholars such as Jonathan Bate (1997, p.vii), continue to claim that Shakespeare is a writer of 'universally acknowledged genius'; the 2012 'Cultural Olympiad' has been dominated by performances of Shakespeare[2], whilst the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2012 London Olympics featured Churchill and Brunel mouthing lines from Shakespeare. Shakespeare is even a match for the technological age: in 2009 one of the 'top ten' iPhone applications according to one newspaper was 'Shakespeare', recommended for settling 'erudite pub arguments'.[3] Politicians from both left and right vie to exploit the genius of Shakespeare, or to invoke the Bard as shorthand for high standards in cultural and educational life: thus the current London mayor, a Conservative, embraces Shakespeare as a counterpoint to rap culture in the capital,[4] while a New Labour Culture minister calls for more Shakespeare to raise standards on television.[5] Perhaps more surprisingly, Trevor Philips, then head of the Commission for Racial Equality, expresses regret that 'this country has lost Shakespeare. That sort of thing is bad for immigrants'.[6]

If by 'lost' Philips means that Shakespeare is absent, or reduced in stature, I disagree: some sort of 'Shakespeare' appears to be alive and kicking, touching various aspects of people's lives in twenty-first century Britain. With the possible exception of Dickens, Shakespeare strikes me as being the only writer who can manage simultaneously to be the archetypal representative of literary high culture,

[2] Editorial, *The Observer*, 29:5:11
[3] *The Observer*, 12:04:09
[4] As reported in *thelondonnews*, www.londonnews.co.uk, accessed 24:11:08
[5] www.telegraph.co.uk, accessed 22:02:09
[6] BBC News, 3:4:2004

yet permeate popular culture. But, as Shaughnessy argues (2007, p.2), this has been the pattern throughout history, where tensions between the ways Shakespeare has been produced, reproduced and reinvented raise 'inevitably vexed questions' about cultural ownership and exactly who the consumers of 'popular' appropriations of Shakespeare are meant to be. Even the terminology employed in academic Shakespeare criticism serves to show how 'Shakespeare' as a cultural entity can constantly adapt and evolve, yet remain able to sustain esteemed professorial careers. So, 'Shakesperotics' describes the breadth of postmodern fascination (Taylor, 1989); 'Shakespop' is applied to the analysis of popular appropriations (Lanier, 2002); 'Bardolatory', originally coined by George Bernard Shaw, is adopted by cultural materialists to critique knee-jerk reverence (Dollimore & Sinfield, 1985). Shakespeare textbooks and new editions of plays, whether aimed at the university or schools market, are a permanent feature of prestigious publisher's catalogues, one indication of Shakespeare's enduring commercial potency.

The ubiquity of 'Shakespeare', therefore, would suggest that most young people come to compulsory study in school with some knowledge and prior experience gained at least from Shakespeare's embeddedness in popular culture, crossing class and ethnic boundaries (for instance, from *Doctor Who* to popular Indian film), even if their familial cultural practices do not include play-reading and theatre-going. Whether the effect of apparently iconoclastic appropriations (such as Bart Simpson as Hamlet!)[7] is to break down the cultural elitism of Shakespeare for these young people or not is, however, open to some debate. Douglas Lanier (2002) argues that despite posing a potential counter-cultural challenge, most popularisations ultimately serve to confirm Shakespeare's iconic status, and actually induct young people into hierarchies of taste and cultural value:

[7] *Tales from the Public Domain* first broadcast in 2002. At the end of the episode, Bart still thinks that *Hamlet* is boring, but Homer assures him that the story is a precursor to the film *Ghostbusters*.

> ...regardless of how popular culture uses Shakespeare, the fact that it habitually attends to Shakespeare at all contributes to Shakespeare's status as a widely shared touchstone and thus sustains his cultural life and power (Lanier, 2002, p.19).

Most commentators would accept that Shakespeare as a brand carries considerable social and economic prestige, an enduring monument to cultural refinement and intellectual prowess (Bristol, 1996; Hawkes, 2003). However, when talking to adolescents in urban British schools, education researchers such as Neelands (2008) and Yandell (1997) indicate that pupils' assumptions about 'doing' Shakespeare are largely negative (eg., 'Shakespeare is for posh people'), despite their likely acquaintance with forms of Shakespeare in popular culture. As Neelands (2008, p.11) comments, 'In terms of power, all cultures are not equal'. He argues that, 'Access and belonging to the culture of power requires knowledge of its symbolic and cultural heritage' (p.10). Neelands concludes that universal schooling in Shakespeare (under certain circumstances) offers a way of providing access to this particular type of cultural capital for all young people.

My own teaching career, spanning some 15 years in London classrooms followed by a number of years working in university Education departments, has witnessed pupils, student teachers and established teachers alike struggling to break down cultural barriers and to make Shakespeare meaningful within the metaphorical classroom walls. This, then, is the context for my PhD thesis. I want to explore what actually happens when 14-16 year olds in four London classrooms encounter Shakespeare. Do the claims made by politicians and some commentators that compulsory Shakespeare is liberatingly democratic stand up? In this study I raise questions about the nature of 'school Shakespeare', how teachers construct it, how it is assessed, what students bring to it – and, ultimately, what sense students make of it.

And what became of Doctor Who? He made his last journey through time and space, sucked into the intergalactic cultural vortex that is Shakespeare. Proving Lanier right, Doctor Who became Hamlet.[8]

[8] David Tenant starred in the RSC's production in Stratford (Autumn 2008), transferring to London's West End.

CHAPTER 1
SHAKESPEARE SAVES THE SCHOOLS:
A HISTORY OF SHAKESPEARE IN THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM[9]

> *...education is about the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next...The facts, dates and narrative of our history in fact join us all together. The rich language of Shakespeare should be the common property of us all. The great figures of literature that still populate the conversations of all those who regard themselves as well-educated should be known to all...And they must be taught to everyone.*
>
> *(former Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, 2010)*

Shakespeare's centrality in the school curriculum is not a new phenomenon. Even by the early 1920s Shakespeare had been established as a central feature of a political project concerned with regulating society, improving literacy levels and invoking national pride. But the foundations for our modern English curriculum and prevailing approaches to school Shakespeare had been laid down in the previous century during England's days of Empire. Whilst recognising that society and social attitudes have undoubtedly changed since then, what I want to do is to draw attention to the continuities and currents that link, for example, Empire, the crisis of early industrialisation, wars (both real and 'cultural') and Britain's late twentieth century struggles to come to terms with not only its declining influence in the world but also its multi-cultural present. Just as Shakespeare's texts themselves reflect the socially tumultuous period within which he was writing, Shakespeare's establishment as a cornerstone of education policy can be traced to two key historical moments, both marked by a perceived threat to the dominant social order and/or a crisis of national identity: firstly at the turn of the last century when English was established as a subject, and secondly at the point of the imposition of the first National Curriculum during the late 1980s.

[9] Parts of this chapter appear in Coles, J. (forthcoming) 'Every child's birthright'? Democratic entitlement and the role of canonical literature in the English National Curriculum. *The Curriculum Journal*

1.1 Theories of culture

Competing notions of culture are central to understanding the ways in which Shakespeare has been deployed historically. Raymond Williams (1965; 1977) traces distinct conceptual strands that have developed over time around the term 'culture'. Particularly relevant for a study of Shakespeare is the link between culture and the concept of 'civilisation'; indeed, Williams notes that in the eighteenth century these two terms were interchangeable; another strand, one which Williams calls 'documentary', encompasses a body of revered intellectual and imaginative work and the act of criticism on it (1965). These two strands are closely linked and, until developments in anthropology and sociology radically challenged idealist theory, they remained the dominant ways of thinking about culture. Both are central to an understanding of the way Shakespeare has been deployed in education, and what has been expected as a result of studying his plays. From an idealist perspective, 'high' and 'low' cultural forms become polarised, the elite separated from the 'mass', the first protected from contamination by the latter. Literature and other cultural activities are seen to exist purely in the realm of ideas, and take on quasi metaphysical properties.

Whilst rejecting rigidly deterministic interpretations of the relationship between base and superstructure, Williams (2005), however, identifies the dangers inherent in regarding culture as a superstructural abstraction, separated from its material base. He emphasises the need instead to analyse culture as part of a 'material social process' (1977, p.94):

> Thus the full possibilities of the concept of culture as a constitutive social process, creating specific and different 'ways of life', which could have been remarkably deepened by the emphasis on a material social process were for a long time missed, and were often in practice superseded by an abstracting unilinear universalism (p.19)

Williams emphatically rejects the notion that literature and other art forms merely reflect social reality; instead, 'culture is a mediation of society' (p.99), involving productive 'social processes of signification and communication' (p.100). As

Sinfield (2004) puts it, societies need to reproduce themselves materially (at one level just to survive) and culturally in order to reproduce the systems of knowledge required to maintain the material productive forces. In this way, culture should not be regarded as offering us a 'refuge from real life' (Eagleton, 1991a, p.7), but as central to our everyday lives, providing a critical tool which might help us to question and explore social practices both of the past and of the present day.

The processes by which certain cultural practices are produced and reproduced, and 'incorporated' into dominant systems of values and beliefs are obviously intensely ideological. Williams identifies educational institutions as of key significance in the process of 'incorporation' (2005, p.39), where the selection and transmission of what is considered to be culturally important by powerful members of that society are promoted as essential and uncontroversial. Opposing views of culture as outlined above can lead to radically different approaches to the teaching of a subject such as English. As Brian Doyle (1989, p.17) argues, the teaching of a national language and literature within an education system has to be recognised 'as a significant influence over commonly acquired senses of self, class, gender, family and nationality'. So, on the one hand, government policy might prescribe a nationally endorsed canon of literature which acts as a kind of 'cultural index' (McLaren, 1988, p.222); on the other, some teachers might work in a counter-cultural way which places students' own cultural knowledge and experiences as a central feature of classroom discourse (see, for instance, Turvey et al., 2006). For many teachers and commentators, engagement with a broad range of cultural activity is regarded as essential if young people are to 'learn who they are and how they are placed in the world; to see themselves but also to see how others see them' (Neelands, 2008, p.9).

The problem is that idealist notions of culture have served not only to mask the underlying political forces at work, but ultimately to have naturalised assumptions about what counts as 'culture' in the education system. Within educational policy – and the English curriculum in particular – the dominant monolithic version of

'cultural heritage' implies that culture equals tradition, embodying a set of values that are part of our 'national character' and as such are not only resistant to change but are experienced in identical ways by all students, regardless of class, ethnicity or gender - a convenient myth for Conservative politicians to promote. The differentiating function of dominant cultural practices in the school curriculum, such as study of Shakespeare, operates to the advantage of students whose own socio-cultural experiences and resources - what Bourdieu terms 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) - most closely match the culture of school. Just as there is an unequal distribution of economic wealth in society, so Bourdieu demonstrated in his studies of French society that there is an unequal distribution of cultural capital, with education acting as a key mechanism for reproducing these inequalities (Bourdieu, 1976b; Apple, 1996). Bourdieu's explanations of the ways in which systems of cultural bias work, rest on the notion of 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1971), our ways of thinking and perceiving which have been formed unconsciously within specific social contexts, and which we carry with us into various social arenas or 'fields' (for example, school). The system of relations between habitus and field is, according to Bourdieu, a complex one, involving struggles for dominance and cultural legitimacy (Eagleton, 1991b). Our specific habitus interacts with the conditions of a field in a way that is likely to affect the way we behave within particular spheres of operation, even shape our expectations and ambitions. However, in their major critical examination of culture and class in modern Britain, Bennett et al (2009) challenge the 'unitary' nature of Bourdieu's concept of habitus, suggesting instead that it is much more 'dissonant', reflective of gender, ethnicity and age (pp.15, 251); nevertheless, they come to the conclusion that 'cultural proclivities are closely associated with social class' (p.251). Because this process of cultural differentiation may happen within largely invisible networks of power and privilege, outcomes conferring success upon those who most closely reflect the dominant culture appear 'natural', based purely on merit rather than social advantage. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), therefore, argue that working class students in school are likely to be assessed in the way they respond to the cultural knowledge and practices which 'belong' to their more middle-class counterparts rather than the practices and experiences they bring with them from home – a

process of 'symbolic violence' (1990), discriminatory power enacted through curriculum construction, examination systems and standardised forms of language. Bennett et al (2009) conclude that even though Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital was developed in 1960s France, with modification it can still provide a useful interpretive lens, particularly in the field of education[10]; indeed Bennett et al argue that neo-liberal market reforms have served to strengthen the relevance of cultural capital as a concept, in the way that they exacerbate social divisions. Recent pronouncements by Conservative Ministers in the prelude to curriculum review in England lend support to this view (eg., Gove, 2010; Gibb, 2010; Gove, 2011).

1.2 Heritage Shakespeare

It is noticeable that over the last hundred years at times of political or economic crisis there has been a tendency for politicians to reach for Shakespeare. Examples are by no means limited to the last century. Early in 2009 the Mayor of London launched a campaign to reinstate St George's Day as a day of celebration on 23 April each year, subsequently diverting funds away from 'Black History' projects to support it (Mulholland, 2010). The London celebrations, according to the Mayor, should be a family event that unites the people of London:

> We have much to be proud of in this great country, England has given so much to the world, politically, socially and artistically. St George's Day is a time to celebrate the very best of everything English and the cross of St George will proudly fly outside City Hall on 23rd April. (www.london.gov.uk/mayor/culture/stgeorge , accessed 9:04:09)

The Mayor's words are marked by a desire to revive a cosy sense of national pride. Because St George's Day shares the same date as Shakespeare's birthday (a

[10] Bennett et al's research critiques Bourdieu's theories in a number of ways; relevant for my argument here is their reformulation of social fields, based on a more diverse, refracted understanding of social divisions and sub-cultural movements.

symmetry that is, quite literally, too good to be true),[11] the programme for the day includes Shakespeare's birthday celebrations at the Globe theatre. In addition, families are to be invited to participate in a mass recitation of Shakespeare's verse, listen to songs performed by the Globe singers and answer quiz questions, activities which promise 'to unlock the timeless beauty of Shakespeare's verse and language' (website as above). Shakespeare's verse is not the only example of timelessness here. In search of a distinct 'English' identity that might unite modern multi-cultural London, Mayor Boris Johnson invokes echoes of empire, when England's political, social and artistic exports to a grateful commonwealth were at their peak. In fact there is something of a timewarp about these Shakespeare's birthday celebrations. A century ago, 'Shakespeare Day' used to be observed in elementary schools, an event designed to remind pre-adolescent children of the glories of 'an Empire as wide as Shakespeare's soul' (Gollancz, 1916, cited in Evans, 1989, p.6). Like the twenty-first century version, a typical Shakespeare Day programme also included songs and recitations. The 1916 programme, for instance, draws attention to Shakespeare's 'sovereignty' which 'has become well-nigh universal - England's most cherished possession, shared and adored by all the world' (Gollancz, 1916, cited in Evans, 1989, p.6). Shakespeare Day is noted appreciatively by the authors of the first government report into English teaching in 1921 as a way of uniting English-speaking children in the United Kingdom and 'the Dominions' (Board of Education, 1921, p.319).

How Shakespeare came to be invested with cultural authority in the nineteenth century and then acquire the cultural dominance to be located at the heart of the National Curriculum for English in the last decade of the twentieth century, has been explored by a number of commentators. Critical accounts of the historical foundations of English as a subject are offered by Baldick (1983), Mathieson (1975), Ball et al (1990), and Doyle (1989) particularly covering the period from the late

[11] The exact date of Shakespeare's birth is not known; records reveal that he was christened at a church in Stratford upon Avon on 26 April 1564. Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616. Patriotic tradition has shifted his birthdate to St George's day.

nineteenth century through to the formation of the Cambridge-based *Scrutiny* group and the establishment of 'Leavisite' practical criticism, which has predominated in the teaching and examining of secondary school literature for much of the post-war years. Derek Longhurst (1982) seeks to analyse ways in which Shakespeare has been constituted as the 'National Poet', the linchpin of 'Eng. Lit' in Higher Education. Leach (1992) and Blocksidge (2003) specifically focus on school Shakespeare. Looking beyond education-focused accounts, Bristol (1996), Henderson (2007) and Lanier (2002) provide historical perspectives on Shakespeare's reception – and even appropriation - since the Renaissance; Gary Taylor (1989) traces Shakespeare's cultural journey across four centuries from glittering 'star' to cultural 'black hole' swallowing up critics and criticism into the 'densening vortex of his reputation' (p.410). It is clear that the way that Shakespeare has been transformed from popular playwright to high cultural icon, as Taylor points out, is as much about literary criticism itself, its relationship to societal changes and the ideological uses to which criticism is put, than about a single author's body of work. An understanding of this transformation provides vital context to an analysis of Shakespeare in the school curriculum, and is taken up in the following sections.

1.3 Shakespeare constructed as literary icon: from renaissance theatre to Victorian study

Shakespeare's construction as elite literary icon describes a journey from popular entertainment literally on the fringes of polite London society, to hyper-establishment, canonical status. It involves what Douglas Lanier calls a process of 'unpopularization', in the sense that 'the history of Shakespearian appropriation is closely tied to the history of cultural stratification' (2002, p.21). Diana Henderson (2007) reminds us that original performances of Shakespeare's plays straddled both playhouse (located physically and metaphorically next to bear-pits and whorehouses) and court. Lanier, however, rejects the popular notion that Shakespeare's theatre was a democratic space, where class distinctions were obscured; instead he depicts Shakespeare as a clever entrepreneur, simultaneously managing to draw on dramatic traditions, genres and stories which appealed to

different tastes and different levels of learning within a single script. The publication of the First Folio edition of the plays in 1623 is generally regarded as a transformative moment in the journey from stage to page (Lanier, 2002); in a society marked by mass illiteracy, the Folio, a luxury commodity aimed as it was at individual readers rather than a collective audience, would have represented a sign of wealth and education. Shakespeare was producing his work in an era of huge change in the circulation and reception of printed text, guaranteeing contemporary popularity not only at the box-office but also on the page. Both Henderson (2007) and Belsey (2007) also draw attention to the fact that printed versions of individual plays were in circulation before Shakespeare's death. But Taylor's comprehensive historical account (1989) makes it clear that Shakespeare's continued popularity cannot be automatically assumed throughout history: when theatres re-opened following the Restoration, it was Jonson's social satires rather than Shakespeare's plays which were first revived. Ironically, the resumption in Shakespeare's popularity only followed some fairly major adaptations to selected plays, for example, Nahum Tate's reworking of *King Lear* (1680), investing the play with a happy ending (the notion of textual authority did not develop until the eighteenth century). Thus began the era of Shakespeare recast as safe, domestic dramas. David Garrick did much to bolster Shakespeare's status and reputation in the second half of the eighteenth century, heralding an era of actor-manager theatrical stars, and what would become the Victorian emphasis on character in both performance and in criticism. A process of 'novelisation' emphasised story and character, as for example in Mary and Charles Lamb's hugely influential *Tales from Shakespeare* first published in 1807; the Lambs' vigorous ethical cleansing and method of domestication rendered the stories suitable for children and women (Taylor, 1989). Not only did the process of sanitising Shakespeare pave the way for Shakespeare's adoption as a national icon in the nineteenth century onwards, but I argue in following chapters that this tendency to focus on story and character is a trait recognisable in National Curriculum school Shakespeare, particularly at Key Stage 3.

Co-opted as bourgeois cultural hero of the newly emergent middle classes in the eighteenth century, Shakespeare began to accrue a sense of Britishness and help foster national identity (Lanier, 2002). Set against a background of colonial expansion, a knowledge of Shakespeare became increasingly desirable as a marker of an English gentleman's education, as is signalled for instance by Jane Austen in *Mansfield Park*.[12] Gradual academic appropriation of Shakespeare included publication in 1864 of the first best-selling 'scholarly' edition of Shakespeare's plays, edited by three academics from Cambridge University. This 'Cambridge' text became established as *the* authoritative text, and coincided with the introduction of the first English courses at university level (Taylor, 1989). In 1859 English for the first time had appeared within a BA course (at London University) with Bacon's *Essays* and Shakespeare's *King Lear* as set texts. In 1897 a small group of students took the first ever exam in 'Literis Anglicis' at Oxford (Potter, 1937). These developments marked the beginnings of the 'professionalisation' of Shakespeare study (Lanier, 2002, p.41). Stephen Potter (1937) traces the fluctuating significance afforded various canonical writers from the late eighteenth century through to the early twentieth by comparing length of entries in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Shakespeare only achieves top spot (overtaking Milton) in the late nineteenth century. Potter also notes that the weight of footnotes in Furness's *Variorum* editions of Shakespeare's plays (1871 onwards) 'make the text look like a pearl in an oyster' (p.69), helping to construct Shakespeare as a great monument of Literature.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw another key period of Shakespeare re-construction relevant to its inclusion in the National Curriculum a century later. A number of factors made Shakespeare attractive as a symbol of nationhood and

[12] Fanny reads to Lady Bertram from *Henry Viii.* Mr Crawford arrives and takes over the reading of one of Wolsey's speeches. He comments: 'Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman's constitution...'; his friend agrees: 'No doubt, one is familiar with Shakespeare in a degree,' said Edmund, 'from one's earliest years. His celebrated passages are quoted by everybody; they are in half the books we open, and we all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions...' chapter 34, p.271 Wordsworth classics edition.

social unity. Firstly, the growth of empire required the production of myths about white intellectual and spiritual supremacy; Shakespeare provided some of the cultural weight needed to sustain this myth. Shakespeare also represented a mythical golden age when 'high' and 'low' culture had, apparently, been happily united (Taylor, 1989; Lanier, 2002). Shakespeare, recast as printed stories, or anthologised as verse extracts, corresponded with notions of Victorian individualism, a reconceptualisation carried over into performances.

This version of Shakespeare, domesticated, civilised and morally uplifting, was perfect for inclusion at the heart of the new subject, when in 1904 the Board of Education included in its Regulations a requirement that all state schools should include courses in English and English Literature.

1.4 Culture or Anarchy: the birth of English

English Literature as a subject arose out of the particularly turbulent period of social history between the mid nineteenth century and the first World War. Traditional religious beliefs were undergoing prolonged challenge from philosophy and science. Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published in 1859 (a best-seller of its day); Marx's *Das Kapital* was published in 1867 (translated into English in 1886). In his account of the construction of English Literature as a subject, Eagleton (1983) emphasises the concern felt by the Victorian ruling classes for the decline of religion as a dependable form of social glue; Literature was regarded as a potentially useful substitute, one which contained moral lessons in an accessible and entertaining format. In the words of the first Oxford Professor of English Literature:

> England is sick and...English literature must save it. The churches (as I understand) having failed, and social remedies being slow, English literature now has a triple function; still, I suppose, to delight and instruct us, but also, and above all, to save our souls and heal the state. (George Gordon, cited in Baldick, 1983, p.156).

It was a period of huge urban growth and widespread poverty as had been chronicled a little earlier in the century by Charles Dickens. The latter half of the nineteenth century was marked by the growth in the Labour movement and by large-scale social unrest, fear of which recurs as a motif in social commentators' contemporary writings. For instance, in 1866 a demonstration organised by the Reform League, attracted 200,000 people who invaded Hyde Park, pulling down the railings and stoning the police; another similar demonstration took place the year later, following a winter of discontent (Cole and Postgate 1976). In *Culture and Anarchy* (first published in 1869), Matthew Arnold refers several times to 'outbreaks of rowdyism' (1960, p.77) to 'The Hyde Park rioter' or the 'Hyde Park rough' (eg p.80) as illustrations of the need to unite and civilise society. In his Preface, Arnold explains the purpose of *Culture and Anarchy* as to:

> recommend culture as the great help out of our present difficulties; culture being a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world (p.6).

Expansion of late nineteenth century imperialism,[13] motivated as it was by a combination of market interests and a mission to civilise, in many ways echoes the establishment of 'Eng Lit'. As Ball *et al* (1990, p.49) comment, 'The purposes of the subject [English] stretched from meeting the demands of industrial competition to reinforcing national solidarity'.

Matthew Arnold must stand as a key intellectual figure in any history of English Literature as a subject and the installation of Shakespeare at its heart (Baldick, 1983; Mathieson, 1975). Arnold, furthermore, remains a touchstone for politicians who see themselves as guardians of the nation's cultural and moral standards (for example, see Gove, 2011; Pascall, 1992). The notion connecting Literature with

[13] In 1876 10% of Africa was under European rule; by 1900 more than 90% had been colonised, mostly by Britain, France and Belgium (Harman, 1999).

cultural heritage identifiable in late twentieth century National Curriculum documents and still recognisable in politicians' speeches derives from *Culture and Anarchy*. The son of a public school headmaster, Arnold was not only a poet and cultural critic, but crucially in terms of his views on education, a government inspector of schools (an HMI). It was in this role that he frequently travelled to socially deprived areas of England and witnessed first hand working class children 'eaten up with disease, half-sized, half-fed, half clothed' (Arnold, 1960, John Dover Wilson ed., p.194). In many ways, Arnold was socially progressive. He promoted creativity instead of passive reception of knowledge, and passionately opposed what he saw as the philistinism/ utilitarianism in the education system, famously satirised by Dickens in the school-room scenes of *Hard Times*. It is this aspect of Arnold that John Dover Wilson emphasises in his 1960 preface to *Culture and Anarchy.* Because Arnold saw Literature as central to his notion of culture, he played a key role in campaigning for English Literature to be introduced into the school system as an alternative to Classics (although, as Mathieson, 1975, points out Classics would, of course, remain as the preferred option within the public school system).

In the third chapter of *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold divides British society into three classes (Barbarians, Philistines and the Populace), his strongest criticism reserved for what he saw as the narrow-minded materialism of the new industrial middle class, the 'Philistines'. He is critical of the old 'feudal' attitudes that underlie class distinctions (p.76), but at the same time is clearly anxious about the 'anarchistic' tendencies of the working class manifested in the 'outbreaks of rowdyism' which he warns are becoming 'less and less of trifles' (p.77). The solution, suggests Arnold in his Preface, lies not in politics, but in the uses to which culture can be put. Unlike politics, according to Arnold, culture teaches us 'disinterestedness' (p.23), by which he meant the opposite of narrow, sectarian views. Shakespeare and Virgil are cited as examples of humane, cultural 'perfection' (p.57), through which social enlightenment ('sweetness and light') will be attained. 'Men of culture' should be viewed as 'apostles of equality' (p.70) under whose influence class distinctions will

simply melt away:

> Culture does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgements and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, - nourished and not bound by them (p.70)

This is a view of class which ignores material conditions and economic relationships, and treats it as if it exists solely in the realm of ideas. Arnold's language is missionary in tone – even nationalistic at times - and borrows from the discourse of religion:

> No people in the world have done more and struggled more to attain this relative moral perfection than our English race has...to resist the devil, to overcome the wicked one (p.55)

Arnold reveals he is aware of how his ideas come across, and he defends himself against the criticism that he is promoting a 'religion of culture...as a cure for human miseries' (p.72). Yet this is, indeed, what he is doing – and how his ideas have been picked up by subsequent educational policy-makers and commentators (for example, by contributors to the Newbolt Report, see below). Although Arnold's desire to achieve a less stultifying elementary school system and more harmonious society is essentially progressive, ultimately he was protective of his own class interests: the Philistines were to be given access to some of the more civilised upper classes' cultural pursuits as long as, in their turn, they reined in the working class through healthy diversions and contact with great minds. That way, Anarchy (or revolutionary desires) could be averted. What makes Arnold's ideas so interesting is that they resurface at key points in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, particularly in the way policy makers regard the relationship between canonised Literature and society, a top-down process, focusing on the consumption of reified literary objects, often symbolised by the individual 'set' Shakespeare play.

Alongside Arnold's campaign to introduce authors such as Shakespeare into the school system, Chris Baldick (1983) identifies three further factors which helped to cement English Literature's formal place in education, first of which were the needs of the British Empire. Entry to the India Civil Service had been opened out to competitive examination under terms of the 1853 India Act, and the report of the East India Company in 1855 proposed English Literature (and, therefore, Shakespeare) as a key element of these exams. Another factor was the emergent campaign promoting better women's education (albeit largely motivated by the upper classes' recognition that they would benefit from a better standard of training for governesses). Baldick also identifies the various adult education movements as highly significant, including the Mechanics Institutes, Working Men's Colleges and extension lectures, a non-traditional educational constituency for whom an alternative to Classics was needed. It is surely significant that A.C.Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* was first published in 1904, the same year that English literature was to be enshrined in the school curriculum[14] – Bradley had been actively engaged in the University Extension movement, and the publication of his Shakespeare lectures would become one of the most influential critical approaches to school Shakespeare in the twentieth century.

The English Association was founded in 1906 with the purpose of promoting English and English Literature as a subject in schools. Seeking to afford Shakespeare the recognition due as the national poet, one of the English Association's first publications was about the teaching of Shakespeare (1908). Its recipe sounds uncannily similar to that being promoted by government approved practitioners writing exactly 100 years later, with a version of 'active methods' and an emphasis on the desirability of seeing a live theatre performance:

> It is desirable that all the Shakespeare chosen for study should be read aloud in class. The living voice will often give a clue to the meaning, and reading aloud is the only way of ensuring a knowledge of the metre...the pupils should be brought

[14] Prior to this, what passed for 'English' in schools had its roots in a view of language study based on Classical instruction: exercises in orthography, etymology and syntax predominated (Ball, 1985). University 'English' degrees were still by and large more closely related to philology than to literary studies.

into play. They can be cast for some of the parts...' (p.2)

In London and in large provincial centres it is possible to let school-children see a performance at the theatre; this plan should be encouraged whenever it is practicable (p. 7)

The examples of reading material provided by Shayer (1972) taken from Board of Education recommendations of this period indicate a reliance on anthologised extracts of classic literature (eg. Malory, *Gulliver's Travels*, the *Faerie Queene*), collections of poetry (eg. English ballads, Arnold, Longfellow, 'Patriotic poems') and Shakespeare (*Julius Caesar*, *the Merchant of Venice*, and *As You Like It* being specifically proposed as suitable for 14-15 year olds). Nevertheless, Ball (1985) cites evidence suggesting that until the Newbolt Report in 1921 most school instruction in English continued to be modelled on Classical grammar with an emphasis on parsing passages.

The Teaching of English in England (Board of Education, 1921), more commonly known as the Newbolt Report, remains a landmark government report into English teaching which places Literature at the heart of English, and Shakespeare at the heart of English Literature. Whilst marking out radical new ground for the fledgling subject (partly by shifting the study of Shakespeare from a philological paradigm to the realm of humanism), it is an overtly political text. Just as Arnold was writing *Culture and Anarchy* against the metaphorical background noise of Hyde Park railings crashing to the ground, the Newbolt Report was written during the post-war surge of national pride, set against the clamour of industrial unrest in England imbued with revolutionary undercurrents from elsewhere in Europe. It is important to put the publication of the Newbolt Report in its political context, four years after the Russian Revolution and just five years away from the English General Strike. Indeed, 1919 saw a series of strikes including major engineering strikes, police strikes in Liverpool and London, and even a mass mutiny of soldiers. A miners' strike was narrowly averted only by the Government making promises they later broke (Harman, 1999). A year later the Communist Party of Great Britain was

formed – despite its small size and comparative lack of electoral success, it played a significant role in the formation of left ideas in the British Trade Union movement (Eaden and Renton, 2002); in the same year three major trade unions (mining, transport and railway) formed a Triple Alliance, a force to be reckoned with given that Trade Union membership had risen from around 4 million in 1914 to over 8 million by 1920 (Cole and Postgate 1976).

None of this was wasted on several key members of the Newbolt Committee (many of whom became renowned Shakespeare scholars). The Chair of the Committee, Sir Henry Newbolt, had a reputation for writing patriotic verse; another member was George Sampson, best known for his publication *English for the English* (1925, first published 1921) in which he expounds his solution to the threat of Bolshevism, by firmly locating Shakespeare as a means of achieving social cohesion. He states his political motivations overtly:

> Deny to working class children any common share in the immaterial, and presently they will grow into the men who demand with menaces a communism of the material (1925, p. xv)

Attention has been drawn both by Baldick (1983) and by Hawkes (1986) to the virulently anti-communist beliefs of another Committee member, John Dover Wilson (later to be editor of Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*), who constructed a particular reading of *Hamlet* in 1917 which reflected his anti-Bolshevik concerns, a reading which deliberately invokes pride in English national culture and promotes ideas of unity (see Hawkes, 1986, pp.101-118). An indication of Dover Wilson's political leanings emerge from his 1932 introduction to *Culture and Anarchy*:

> what is wrong with labour today is not so much low wages and long hours as its lack of social meaning in the eyes of the worker, and what is wrong with our culture is its divorce from the crafts of common life (1960, John Dover Wilson ed., p.xxxvii)

He goes on to compare 'the shadow of domestic anarchy' under which *Culture and Anarchy* was written, with an almost apocalyptic vision of 1930s Britain:

> if it be not too bold to say this within five years of the Great Strike, a huger shadow has taken its place, that of a world-anarchy which threatens to bring the whole structure of civilisation toppling to the ground (1960, p.xxxviii)

Consequently, it is no surprise that in the pages of the Newbolt Report an imperative is to nurture post-war nationalistic pride at the same time as promoting social cohesion through the civilising effects of reading Shakespeare, 'our greatest English writer' (p.312, 319). In this key aspect the Committee made clear connections with Arnold,[15] even echoing Arnold's language:

> ...it points to a morbid condition of the body politic which if not taken in hand may be followed by lamentable consequences. For if literature be, as we believe, an embodiment of the best thoughts of the best minds, the most direct and lasting communication of experience by man to men, a fellowship which 'binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it is spread over the whole earth, and over all time' then the nation of which a considerable portion rejects this means of grace, and which despises this great spiritual influence, must assuredly be heading for disaster. (Board of Education, 1921, p.252-3)

Great Literature teaches us what it's like to be human – a state which the Newbolt Committee were at pains to stress is universal across cultures and across time:

> All great literature has in it two elements, the contemporary and the eternal. On the one hand, Shakespeare and Pope can tell us what Englishmen were like at the beginning of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries. On the other hand they tell us what all men are like in all countries and at all times. To concentrate

[15] Compare Reid (2002) who rejects Arnold as the main influence behind the Newbolt Report, and instead identifies Wordsworthian ideas about imagination, personal growth and Romantic notions of childhood. Reid argues that association of Newbolt with Arnold by Mathieson (1975) and others are 'unsubstantiated' (p.27). Whilst Reid makes a convincing case in tracing Romantic ideology through the history of English and into notions of personal growth as constructed, for example, by John Dixon, what he does not address are the clear textual echoes arising out of the socio-political contexts – particularly marked in those sections of Newbolt dealing with Literature and Shakespeare. In addition, further evidence can be found in Dover Wilson's enthusiastic support for the ideas of Arnold in his edition of *Culture and Anarchy*.

> the study of literature mainly on the first aspect, to study it mainly as history, is to ignore its nobler more eternal and universal element. (Board of Education, 1921, p.205).

1.5 Culture in crisis: the Great Tradition

As Hawkes puts it, if Newbolt's 'spiritual father is Matthew Arnold, its spiritual son is F.R.Leavis' (Hawkes, 1986, p.111). Leavis, like Arnold, regarded society as in the process of fragmentation, and sought the solution in culture, particularly in Literature. Like Arnold, Leavis developed his ideas during a period of social and political unrest (Ball et al., 1990) with the General Strike (1926), and the economic slump of the 1930s leading up to World War II. For Leavis, Literature had the advantage over real political engagement by focusing 'not [on] economical and material determinants, but intellectual and spiritual' (Leavis, 1952, p.184). He and his *Scrutiny* colleagues pursued their project to combat the corrosive effects of industrialisation and mass culture with missionary zeal – and with motivations as contradictory as Arnold's. At once progressive in their rejection of the 'gentleman academics' hitherto running university English studies as quasi-Classics, they were at the same time reactionary in their nostalgia for a mythic English past, and elitist in their insistence that only a particularly sensitive and discriminating few could achieve true appreciation of Great Literature (Leavis, 1952).[16] Leavis' project not only encompassed the development of a critical method of 'reading' texts (analysed in Chapter 2), but also prescribed a humanising canon of English Literature, which it goes without saying included Shakespeare. Importantly for the seriousness with which English was to be taken as a subject, the Scrutineers made a clear, practical link between English Studies at university level and at school (Ball et al., 1990). Consequently they endeavoured to influence the training of the next generation of English teachers who might take the moral crusade forward, combating the degenerative effects of popular culture on young minds (Mathieson, 1975). Ball et

[16] Miller (1984) qualifies the accusation that the *Scrutiny* movement was wholly elitist, given the project included systematic training in practical criticism, presumably supported by a belief that some students could attain the required level of sensitivity through training.

al (1990, p.55, 56) locate the 'apotheosis' of the 'Leavisite consensus' in the post-war grammar school sixth form.

Leavis' method of close textual study or 'practical criticism', focusing on a narrowly selective canon from the 'Great Tradition', became the dominant approach to teaching English Literature throughout the 1940s and 1950s, very much apparent in the form and scope of O level and A level examination questions of this period (see Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of these). Even as late as 1990, Ball et al (1990, p.55) were able to state that Leavis and the Cambridge School of English 'remains the most powerful philosophy of English teaching'. Leavis' readings of specific Shakespeare plays (for example, *Othello, Measure for Measure)* along with those of his colleague, L.C.Knights (for example, *Hamlet, King Lear*) assumed hegemonic dominance as interpretations, reproduced in countless study aids and teachers' dictated notes for decades. Ultimately, as Raymond Williams summarises in *Culture and Society* (1987), Leavis' project promotes the 'concept of a cultivated minority set over a "decreated" mass', based on a belief in 'a wholly organic and satisfying past, to be set against a disintegrated and dissatisfying present' , which ' tends in its neglect of history to a denial of real social existence' (p.263). Such a view of readers and of history has permeated the reception of Shakespeare within the education system for over half a century. As Janet Batsleer et al (1985) argue:

> Despite the thoroughgoing theoretical deconstruction of liberal-humanist criticism, it [the Leavis project] remains the most powerful philosophy of English teaching, not because of the coherence or truth of its underlying philosophy and world-view, but because what *Scrutiny* proposed was a practical cultural-educational project, concerned with <u>what</u> should be taught and <u>how</u> it should be taught (p.164).

Leavis' notion of reading literature indeed proved to be remarkably resilient even as divergent movements in English teaching were gaining prominence from the 1960s (for example, the London School which developed from the ideas of James Britton, Douglas Barnes, Harold Rosen, and John Dixon). As Ball et al (1990) comment, the latter group theorised the learner as central to learning, with the teacher less of a missionary bringing civilisation to the masses, and more of 'an anthropologist,

mapping and collecting the values and culture of subordinate groups' (p.58). In this model the focus is on language in use, rather than the language of the literary text. Ball (1985) suggests the Cambridge School held greatest influence over grammar school practices, whilst the London School's object of attention was more closely allied to the new comprehensives. Medway (1990) identifies shifts in English teaching during the 1960s, away from Leavis' elitist notions of cultural instruction towards Dixon's more child-centred personal growth model; yet his small-scale study focuses on practices evident in the lower years of secondary schools (both grammar and comprehensive). This limitation is significant when considering the teaching of Shakespeare, since this occurred mainly in the upper years of secondary education, encompassing both grammar schools and 'O' level streams in comprehensives. Evidence from O level exam questions (see next section), and from Barnes & Barnes' (1984) investigation of literature study in the 'fifth form' (ie 15-16 year olds) indicate transmission model instruction dominating the teaching of Shakespeare, with the O level exam seen as requiring little more than regurgitation of the teacher's authoritative 'knowledge'. This accords with my own lived experience as a grammar school pupil in the early 1970s and as a teacher of O Level Literature (for 'top sets' in comprehensive schools) in the mid 1980s.

1.6 Conservatism, Culture and the National Curriculum

Any curriculum document defines what the authors believe to be valued knowledge, and this is even more true of a 'national' curriculum, where particular knowledge and skills are selected as 'essential' for the nation's young people. This process of selection is, however, likely to be highly contested, serving to privilege one set of knowledge over another, yet creating an illusion of national consensus. In his pioneering analysis of the inter-relationship between curriculum and society, Bernstein (1971, p.47) argued that there is a direct relationship between 'the distribution of power' in a society and the process of selecting, classifying and transmitting 'the educational knowledge it considers to be public'. This process of selection has a normalising effect, legitimising the cultural assumptions of the socially and economically powerful classes whilst marginalising the cultural lives of

others (Apple, 1996; Williams, 1965; Young, 1971). As such, the formation of a centralised curriculum for English as a subject was always likely to be a site of bitter ideological conflict. Born out of what Jones (1989) calls 'the Conservative revolution' in education, the first National Curriculum document for English, launched in 1989, combines the seemingly contradictory strands of modernism and nostalgia which had come to form the core of Conservative education policy under Margaret Thatcher (Jones, 1989). What had passed for a post-war consensus – roughly speaking, the move towards a more egalitarian education system including the establishment of comprehensive schools – came under sustained attack by right-wing educationists from the 1970s onwards, most prominent being the authors of a series of articles published as the *Black Papers* (edited by Cox and Dyson and first published in 1969), and a right-wing think-tank, the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS, formed in 1974). Consistently arising as ideological themes in these publications were concerns with falling standards (linked to the needs of modern industry for a skilled workforce), lack of authority and cultural degeneration (Ball et al., 1990). In education, English and History became the two of the most contested sites of ideological struggle. It is not hard to see why. As far as English goes, the desire to reconnect with a mythical past and a strong sense of nationhood, to introduce rules and authority, and to replace multiculturalism with a (mono-) cultural heritage could all be addressed through a fixation on Standard English grammar and the study of great works of canonised literature. John Marenbon's CPS pamphlet, *English Our English* (1987) perfectly exemplifies this heritage model of English reconstituted as a body of depoliticised knowledge which can be transferred unproblematically from teacher to student. In Marenbon's world, there is one canon of literature and one way to read it:

> A good teacher should be sceptical of originality in response to literature because it is most likely to betray a failure of understanding. The competent reader reads a work of literature much as any other competent readers read it (1987, p.37)

There is an inward-looking, closed circularity in Marenbon's definition of 'great' literature: children learn to appreciate what this is 'only by reading the literary works which are recognized as outstanding' (p.37). Tradition provides the authority

and tradition must not be questioned. Ball et al (1990) point out the clear historical echoes:

> the educational clock is being wound firmly backwards. The dual orthodoxies of English teaching in the 1920s, of the Newbolt Report and the Classical tradition are being re-established: on the one hand a literary canon of literature, the great works that must be read, linked to the literary and cultural heritage of Great Britain; and the other hand, a standard language, fixed in grammatical structure, spelling and punctuation, defined from above and ignoring all cultural variations and widely used non-standard forms (p.70).

In appointing Brian Cox, one of the editors of the *Black Papers*, to chair the working group drawing up the National Curriculum for English in 1988, the Government had, in effect, thrown down the ideological gauntlet to the teachers' unions and the professional subject association for English teachers (NATE). Whereas the relatively new GCSE English Literature qualification (for 15-16 year olds) had enabled teachers and students to negotiate their own choice of texts (for a short space of time Shakespeare technically was not compulsory), the Government's concept for the new National Curriculum was meant to reverse this trend and prescribe a list of canonised authors.[17] In the event, the Cox committee surprised everyone by rejecting the prescription of a list of authors from the canon, and naming only Shakespeare as a compulsory author for study during Key Stages 3 and 4. Consequently the 'Cox Report' was received relatively warmly by the majority of teachers for apparently managing to synthesise opposing traditions of English teaching both in relation to language and to literature (Marshall, 2000a). Despite recommending a broader range of literature than envisaged by their right-wing political masters, in singling out Shakespeare as the only named author in the curriculum, members of the Cox committee were in effect (albeit probably unintentionally) asking Shakespeare to do the job originally designed for the missing canon. In terms that echo the literature passages of Newbolt, the Cox document justifies this move with references to 'universal values', 'rich and subtle

[17] The political machinations surrounding the work of the subject group are described in detail by Brian Cox (1991a).

meanings' and to 'great writing which has been influential in shaping our language and culture' (DES, 1989, paragraphs 7.15, 7.16). The clinching rationale appeals to a deceptively simple common sense position: 'almost everyone agrees that [Shakespeare's] work should be represented in a National Curriculum' (DES, 1989, paragraph 7.16).

Cox and his committee, acutely aware of the controversial nature of the inclusion of Shakespeare, acknowledged those teachers who would take a more culturally critical view of Shakespeare, and who 'argue that pupils should be encouraged to think critically about his status in the canon' (paragraph 7.16). Yet teachers holding diametrically opposed theoretical positions are simply guided by the Report towards the 'active methods' of the Cambridge Shakespeare and Schools Project - thus carefully eliding questions of culture, pedagogy and curriculum content. The opening paragraphs of the section on Literature clearly lean towards an Arnoldian view of the power of literature. Literary study is invoked as an 'enrichment for pupil and teacher alike'; pupils will 'grow' through literature, 'emotionally and aesthetically, both morally and socially' (paragraphs 7.2, 7.3). Literature is presented as the central cultural form within a student's educational experience and as a central feature of a student's individual emotional development. Despite the recommendation to extend the 'official' literary canon to 'a wide range' of literature 'from different parts of the world' (paragraph 7.5), ultimately this is so that students will 'be in a position to gain a better understanding of the cultural heritage of English literature itself' (paragraph 7.5). Shakespeare, as the sole representative of the English canon, takes pre-eminence in the curriculum.

Brian Cox claimed his Report was 'revolutionary' in its break with a conservative tradition. But it is worth asking the question what view of culture the Cox committee had and what relationship they saw Literature having to it. In his article tellingly entitled 'Magic of Words' (1991b), Brian Cox clearly subscribes to a particularly individualised 'personal growth' model of reading:

> In my lectures I always read many poems, celebrate the music of words in

> Shakespeare...When contemporary literary theorists tell me that Shakespeare's greatness is culturally determined...I feel sorry for them...when I watch a new production of *The Tempest*...I inhabit a world beyond rational explanation.

In the same article, Cox outlines how, in his youth, reading classic works of literature 'transformed [his] life', enabling him to 'build an alternative identity' and escape from his working class roots. Embedded in Cox's Curriculum is a belief that canonical Literature will help working class youngsters rise up and out of their class, a concept surely behind some Labour ministers' embracing of a cultural heritage approach to the curriculum (eg Johnson, cited in Ward & Connolly, 2008).

Cox, to his credit, was keen to avoid perpetuating a narrowly nationalistic English curriculum (Marshall, 2000b; Cox, 1991a) but his naive belief that students will, for example, shed racist views by reading literature from other cultures (Cox, 1991b) is based on a view of social relations that are individualised, dislocated from questions of class, power and political oppression. Cox and his committee's faith in the civilising potential of placing literature at the centre of the curriculum is complicated by the construction of a false polarity between 'culture' and utilitarianism:

> To deny this is to abandon all hope for liberal education, and to condemn the schools to a narrow policy based on vocational training (Cox, 1991a, p.76)

Nevertheless, from the moment of its publication the 'Cox curriculum' was systematically undermined by the political right. Brian Cox himself was attacked for being 'soft-headed', 'going native' and even branded a friend of anarchists (Marshall, 2000a, p.12). David Pascall, a BP executive, was appointed Chair of the National Curriculum Council by the Conservative government and asked to take charge of revising the English orders; amongst other ideologically significant aspects of these revisions was the imposition of a literary canon, which has remained in

various permutations of the English orders ever since. Pascall's speech to the Royal Society of the Arts in 1992 makes his position clear in terms how he regarded the relationship between culture, nation and education. On the one hand Pascall acknowledges today's students will have 'a range of cultural experiences' (1992, p.16); on the other he repeatedly talks of 'our' culture, or 'a' culture and asserts that 'we' all 'share a set of values and traditions which has been developed over the centuries' (p.5). Not surprisingly, those 'important strands from our culture' which 'define and enrich our present way of life' are 'of the Christian faith, the Greco-Roman influence, the liberal Enlightenment' (p.5). All examples of 'great art' he cites come from the Euro-American tradition (such as Tolstoy, Mahler, Elgar, Eliot, Shakespeare and Mozart). In arguing for all children's entitlement to this highly selective cultural diet, Pascall invokes a deficit model of 'other' cultures, positioning popular culture solely as a tool to help us distinguish between poor art ('a pervasive diet of sloppy speech and soap operas', p.18) and great art. To Pascall, education about the arts is 'part of a civilising curriculum' which will contribute 'to our moral and spiritual good' (p.11); behind artists such as Mozart or Shakespeare 'lie essential truths about our understanding of humanity' (p.15). Internally contradictory, Pascall's speech exposes his version of the entitlement argument as shallow and excluding.

Pascall's English Curriculum, although appearing in draft form, never made it to the statute book; with widespread teacher dissent (for example, a national boycott of the newly introduced SATs tests) the government was forced into promising the teacher unions a wholesale curriculum review, this time chaired by another captain of industry, Sir Ron Dearing. In the intervening years since the Cox version, the National Curriculum for English has undergone four different incarnations, all of which have retained some form of Pascall's prescriptive list of canonical texts, including Shakespeare as a compulsory component at both Key Stage 3 and at Key Stage 4. In the way literature is conceptualised, the underlying view of culture remains largely unaltered despite the election of a New Labour government in 1997. No Secretary of State for Education in either the Blair or the Brown

administrations between 1997 and 2010 had either the ideological inclination or the political will to adopt a different cultural agenda. Thus, for instance, Shakespeare has consistently been constructed by curriculum documents in England as part of the literary heritage within the programme of study for 'Reading' (Franks, 1999), whereas in the current Welsh version, Shakespeare appears primarily as a dramatist for performance (Marshall, 2011). Just as with the original 'Cox' curriculum, even in the 2007 revised version references to Shakespeare are steeped in canonical discourse, language which serves to undermine claims to inclusion and which places readers in a different relationship than with non-canonical texts: Shakespeare and other major writers still stand for 'quality' to be appreciated, whereas texts from 'different cultures and traditions' are to be interrogated in terms of their 'values and assumptions' (QCA, 2007, section 3.2). Drawing on Bourdieusian theories of cultural transmission, Guillory's analysis of curriculum formation in the higher education sector is relevant here, where he argues that curricula which have been liberalised in order to embrace non-canonical texts may actually serve to 'institutionalise' distinctions (Guillory, 1993, p.19). Canonicity or otherwise, he suggests, is located in historical traditions of transmission and culturally produced senses of ownership and can only be successfully challenged on those terms (rather than on grounds of representation).

1.7 Authorised Culture: the argument of democratic entitlement

The notion of 'entitlement' persistently threads its way through the discourse about school Shakespeare from the Cox Report onwards. Employing the rhetoric of social inclusion, successive Education Secretaries from the Blair, Brown and Cameron governments have stressed the benefits of promoting an apparently common culture through the National Curriculum (as reported, for example, in the following news articles: Williams, 2010; Brettingham, 2007; TES, 2008; Khan, 2009; Lightfoot, 2001). It is argued that pupils from the least advantaged backgrounds will benefit academically and socially from the opportunity to encounter Shakespeare and other canonical writers at school, based on the assumption that this would not happen unless Shakespeare is made compulsory. This policy position is shot

through with contradictions: so, for example, Shakespeare is at once regarded as part of 'our' common heritage, and yet apparently absent from many pupils' lives outside of school; Shakespeare is self-evidently 'good for' pupils, yet teachers need to be coerced by means of legislation lest they omit it; Shakespeare is claimed to carry 'universal' meanings and yet when studied by the masses it requires special pedagogical approaches such as promoted by the English Association over a century ago (1908), the Cox Committee (DES, 1989, para 7.16) and currently by the RSC (2007; 2008). Cultural entitlement as a concept crosses political boundaries. Although very much in tune with some Tory ministers' thinking at the inception of the National Curriculum, it was also adapted by more liberal commentators, here typified by an editorial in the *Independent* newspaper:

> Bright children from educated backgrounds will continue to be exposed to the classics, at home if not at school. Working class students and those from immigrant backgrounds rely more heavily on their classroom experience (18:2:91)

The entitlement argument was a position also favoured by academic liberals in the late 1980s seeking to safeguard the canon within the teaching of English. At a Birkbeck College conference organised by the Higher Education English Association in February 1991, one of the key speakers, Professor Marilyn Butler, warned of the dangers of leaving canonical Literature the preserve of 'posh kids'. Invoking 'class politics', she claimed the study of canonical Literature to be 'democratic', a move which 'lets people escape from narrow circumstances' (quoted in the *Independent,* 17:2:91). Nearly twenty years later, it was an argument rehearsed by Labour Minister for Education, Alan Johnson, who in 2007 overturned curriculum review proposals to remove lists of canonical authors on the basis that having access to high culture is a way of transcending one's working class origins (Ward and Connolly, 2008). As an ideological position, it echoes what Sinfield (2004, p.215) terms 'left culturism', a preoccupation with upward mobility brought about through education by means of an individual's cultural transformation. More recently still, but this time from the perspective of a key Conservative ideologue, Shakespeare has been invoked as the saviour of the poor and dispossessed by Michael Gove. In

his inaugural Conservative Party speech as Education Minster, he named Shakespeare, Dryden and Pope as 'every child's birthright' and envisaged a 'child enraptured by a performance of *Hamlet*' as one means of 'liberat[ing] our poorest children from the shadow of ignorance and the chains of dependency' (Gove, 2010). In his analysis of neoliberalism, David Harvey (2005) notes how successive governments in the UK and USA from the 1980s onwards, have felt the need to address the inevitable social fragmentation wrought by increased marketisation. He identifies the mobilisation of traditional forms of culture as a way of building an illusion of social cohesion. It is a trait particularly noticeable in policy pronouncements issued by the current Coalition Government, on the one hand undermining public services by the introduction of new forms of privatisation, yet on the other highlighting the appeal of apparently shared values and experiences. In a 2011 speech at Cambridge University (in the months directly following urban riots in the UK), Gove employs the metaphor of inherited wealth to indicate the value of an education steeped in high cultural traditions, what he calls 'that amazing legacy, that treasure-house of wonder':

> We may not all be able to inherit good looks or great houses, but all of us are heir to the amazing intellectual achievements of our ancestors....I am unapologetic that all children have a right to the best. And there is such a thing as the best (Gove, 2011).

Significantly, school students are only entitled to share specific forms of 'the best' culture. Drawing explicitly on an Arnoldian concept of culture, Gove claims in the same speech that 'the best' includes Shakespeare, Wagner and Balzac and not only emphatically excludes the linguistic study of recordings of Eddie Izzard (a comedian renowned for his individualistic verbal creativity) but also commonly studied set texts such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. The privileging of a narrow set of high cultural forms as 'essential knowledge' accompanied by the dismissal of more popular culture as 'cheap sensation and easy pleasure' (Gove, 2011) serves to intensify the stratification of cultural knowledge and to marginalise the kinds of popular cultural practices most familiar to the

majority of secondary students. Underneath the illusion of there being a 'standard' culture, lies an expectation that school students all receive this curriculum in the same way, regardless of their diverse backgrounds, preferences and experiences (Apple, 1996). It is presented by politicians as a straightforward academic transaction enabling social mobility, but from a Bourdieusian perspective, such a curriculum reproduces existing class advantages by adopting the cultural practices of the powerful and using this as an apparently neutral measure of 'ability'. It not only amounts to the 'transformation of the social heritage into a scholastic heritage' (Bourdieu, 1976a, p.113), but reifies cultural practice as inert pockets of knowledge.

It is perhaps therefore not surprising that the question of access has accompanied the construction of a so-called entitlement curriculum. As Kress et al (2005) argue there has been a marked shift in schools since the inception of the National Curriculum, a 're-agenting' (p.14) which has subtly transferred professional attention from 'curriculum design' to 'curriculum delivery' (p.15). The curricular imposition of an authorised version of culture means that schools have had to focus on developing specific pedagogical strategies in an attempt to engage students with subject matter completely disconnected from their everyday lives (Jones, 2003, Moore, 2006). What makes this worse is that this knowledge has been separated from any understanding of social practice, and dressed up as if universal. In the case of compulsory Shakespeare, this possibly explains why the Cox Committee was keen to recommend a specific teaching method ('active Shakespeare'), aware that this act of even limited canonical prescription would raise serious challenges for comprehensive school teachers and their pupils. Sinfield (2004) reminds us that the earlier Bullock Report (1975) had recommended more sensitive teaching as a solution to working class pupils feeling 'betrayed' by their lack of 'discrimination' when responding to literature:

> Literature was presented as a universal culture, and this high claim ratified discriminations in teaching and examinations that, actually, were largely those of class and teachability. The alleged inclusiveness afforded mechanisms of exclusion (Sinfield, 2004, p.64).

Indeed, this echoes Bourdieu's analysis of the key role of the school system in creating an illusory 'cultural consensus' (1976b, p.193) which ignores the particular cultural histories of the participants. The notion that there is such a thing as a common cultural inheritance which can be accessed equally by whole cohorts of students obscures existing inequalities both in economic and cultural terms and throws the essential problem with this as an educational proposition at the feet of classroom teachers. In the current performance-driven educational climate, young people's diverse 'repertoires of practice' (Gutierrez et al., 1995, p.111) are largely ignored in the face of pre-determined learning outcomes which fit the standardised assessment regimes, a shift that Jones (2003) characterises as 'culture reinvented as management' in his article of that name. Kress *et al*'s research in urban classrooms (2005) reveals English teachers struggling to come to terms with this dilemma in a variety of ways; they depict teachers in one multi-ethnic school embracing the democratic entitlement argument, resulting in a relentless focus on organisational aspects of practice in their concern to provide 'access' (which, in the end is of a very limiting kind) to texts such as *Macbeth* for their largely working class students. There is a growing body of research which suggests that the reification of literature within the curriculum more often than not leads to routinised classroom tasks based on a decontextualised, authoritative model of reading (see, for instance, Bloome, 1994, Dymoke, 2002, Kress et al., 2005), an approach which Bernstein terms 'facticity' (cited in Kress et al., 2005, p.87) where classroom emphasis falls on the surface meaning of the text rather than on the learners and what they make of it. In contrast, some of Yandell's classroom-based research (for example, see Yandell, 2007) provides glimpses of an inner London teacher manoeuvring classroom space within which students' own cultural experiences contribute to the production of new multi-modal texts based on *Richard III*. However, Ward & Connolly (2008) argue that teachers who alternatively adopt counter-hegemonic positions are ultimately likely to be defeated because the very act of having to engage with the authorized canon 'reaffirm[s] its power' (p.304).

'Access' to this dislocated knowledge demands that literature be repackaged as

isolated artefact, removed from all meaningful cultural processes. This chimes almost exactly with the former Schools Minister Nick Gibb's ringing endorsement of a facts-based curriculum delivered through transmission teaching with which I opened this chapter. It represents a vision of education in which selected scraps of Culture are 'transferred' from the advantaged ('those who regard themselves as well-educated') to the culturally impoverished. Under these circumstances, as Williams warned two decades ago, Literature becomes strengthened as the preserve of 'the informed critical minority' (Williams, 2005, p.18).

What kind of literary experience pupils are being offered is, of course, a focus of my classroom based research. Before moving on to my empirical data, however, in the next Chapter I want to focus more closely on the way school Shakespeare has been constructed within the examination system, shaped by literary critical traditions. I start with an overview of literature which deals with pedagogical considerations of school Shakespeare.

CHAPTER 2

'SCHOOL SHAKESPEARE':

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Pedagogical traditions and research: a review

Published literature on the subject of Shakespeare in education falls mainly into three broad categories. Firstly, handbooks for teachers which promote the benefits of a particular practical approach; secondly, texts which attempt to place Shakespeare in a social and historical context, mostly published in the 1990s in the wake of the 'culture wars' and concomitant revision of Shakespeare's status and value. The third - disparate – grouping consists of various reports of school-based research, both qualitative and quantitative, including surveys.

Within the first category, one underlying theme in any discussions of Shakespeare in the secondary classroom over the last twenty years has been that of 'active Shakespeare'. Usually this term is used to refer to an approach similar to that developed by Rex Gibson and his hugely influential national Shakespeare and Schools project based at the Cambridge Institute of Education in the late 1980s. 'Active Shakespeare' is defined by Gibson in a later publication (1998, p.xii) as 'dramatic realisation', demanding a high level of imaginative participation and 'informed personal response' (p.xiii) on the part of students. Gibson emphasises that it is 'the antithesis of methods in which students sit passively, without intellectual or emotional engagement' (p.xii). Gibson's project offered teacher secondments, extended and 'one-off' professional development events, produced a journal (1986-1994), a project report (1990), several Gibson-authored monographs (for example 1998; 1997) and led to the Cambridge Schools Shakespeare editions of

the plays (now moving into their third edition). Teaching methods arising out of Gibson's Shakespeare in Schools project were lauded by the authors of the *Cox Report* (DES, 1989, paragraph 7.16) for successfully enabling secondary pupils 'of a wide range of abilities' to 'find Shakespeare accessible, meaningful and enjoyable', leading on to more formal textual study:

> The project has demonstrated that the once-traditional method where desk-bound pupils read the text has been advantageously replaced by exciting, enjoyable approaches that are social, imaginative and physical.

In many subsequent interpretations of Gibson's work 'active Shakespeare' has tended to denote any practical drama-based method, where pupils step out from behind their desks. The current Royal Shakespeare Company's 'Stand up for Shakespeare' campaign, for instance, rather misleadingly calls for pupils to learn Shakespeare 'on their feet' (RSC, 2008). The ways in which Gibson himself defined the term 'active Shakespeare' suggested that he originally meant more than the merely physical. For example, Gibson (1998, pp.xii-xiii) encourages 'personal engagement' which is both 'critical' and 'appreciative', through which students 'become the agents of their own learning' (pp.xii-xiii); his first stated principle of teaching Shakespeare is to treat the play as a script; the second is to 'make Shakespeare learner-centred' (p.9). Throughout Gibson's work, he is keen to demystify Shakespeare for school students and break down barriers. However, on occasions Gibson's own passionate enthusiasm for Shakespeare leads him to adopt the conventionally reverential attitudes the project appears to be replacing. So, for example, in the closing remarks of his preface to *Teaching Shakespeare* (1998) he justifies the inclusion of Shakespeare in the curriculum by arguing that:

> Every student is entitled to make the acquaintance of genius. Shakespeare remains a genius of outstanding significance in the development of English language, literature and drama (p.6)

Teaching Shakespeare is infused with such contradictions. Despite his claim to make Shakespeare learner-centred, ultimately the writer and the texts themselves never stray far from the centre of attention. The invitations for 'every student ... to create his or her own meaning' (p.9), to locate 'relevance' in the lives of characters within individual plays, and to indeed ask 'how many children had Lady Macbeth?' (p.18) are to embrace a bewildering theoretical perspective which combines Bradleyan expressive realism and the seemingly boundless meanings made possible by post-modernism. I think that herein lies the key problem with the Gibson model and the way it has been shaped by its inheritors: in his attempts to speak to all teachers, to exclude no-one in his passionate crusade to revolutionise Shakespeare teaching, his text books lack a coherent critical focus. Thus, in *Teaching Shakespeare* he lists and summarises all theoretical approaches which 'currently inform the study of Shakespeare in universities' (p.26) all of which are embraced as of apparent equal value and from which teachers are encouraged to select those perspectives most 'suitable for their own students' (p.26). This central theoretical ambivalence means that for many classroom practitioners the activity-based approach may simply be added to their existing repertoire of teaching strategies, thereby, in effect, reducing pedagogy to method. How can, for instance, a Leavisite focus on the words of the reified text reconcile itself with a genuinely learner-centred pedagogy?

A good indication of the kinds of activities developed by Gibson's Shakespeare and School's Project can be found in contributions by participating teachers in the Project's publication, *Secondary School Shakespeare* (Gibson, 1990) where a loose collection of workshops, lesson ideas and schemes of work include use of role- play, modern analogy, choral reading, acting/directing and other common drama-based techniques in order to explore individual Shakespeare plays. Despite Gibson's introductory premise that the role of student readers is to be 'active, meaning-making, creative, participatory' (p.9) in most contributions the activities are heavily teacher-led, and offer limited scope for students to produce their own meanings, or indeed to move away from the conventional character-theme-plot triad. That these

lessons are physically active and sometimes creatively playful tends to mask the conventional nature of most of the character explorations and the relationship between reader and text. Ultimately, the exam-driven goal of moving school students towards a more formal study of the text serves to construct the drama-based activities as a kind of methodological bridge, one where starting-points are rendered irrelevant and where the destination becomes the development of readers who are better motivated and more receptive to exam-oriented interpretation – something almost akin to Leavis' notion of the idealised sensitive reader who can access the author's true meanings through close attention to the words on the page.

Gibson's 'active Shakespeare' has been highly significant in the development of English teaching in the past twenty years (Kress et al., 2005), partly evidenced by the huge popularity of the spin-off series of Cambridge School Shakespeare editions of the plays[18]; and also evidenced, for instance, in the way teaching Shakespeare is promoted in textbooks aimed at trainee English teachers (eg., Davison and Dowson, 1998, Dymoke, 2009, Brindley, 1994, Fleming and Stevens, 2004). Much of the current RSC 'Time for Change'/'Stand up for Shakeapeare' (2007b) campaign owes a debt to Gibson's 'active Shakespeare', as does the proliferation of set-text focused workshops by the Globe theatre, devised for groups of pupils and also as INSET for English teachers (eg., Cornford, 2001). One unfortunate effect of this, I think, has been to maintain a false dichotomy between 'desk-bound' teaching (bad) and 'active' teaching (good). 'Bored with the Bard? Then tread the boards' as the *Times Educational Supplement* headline would have it (Evans, 2006). This is a view which underpins a so-called 'Shakespeare manifesto' (Thomas, 2007) appearing in a NATE[19] publication (published prior to the eventual abolition of end of Key Stage 3 national tests, or SATs, in 2008). In this article, Peter Thomas (commissioned by NATE to collate best practice in this field) embraces the RSC initiative as 'a welcome

[18] For example, my edition of *Othello* alone – never a set SATs play - has sold over 270,000 copies since its first publication in 1992

[19] The National Association for the Teachers of English, the main professional body in the UK

resurrection of Rex Gibson's Shakespeare and Schools promotion of active work with playtext for performance potential' (p.54). Whilst dismissing the SATs as 'philistine abuse' and a 'national disgrace', and whilst accepting that Shakespeare may be 'hijacked by those looking for tokens of Britishness' (p.54), what he offers as a corrective in his manifesto is what he calls a 'socialising' agenda, one in which a liberal belief in the humanising power of good literature predominates. Reading Shakespeare enables us to 'understand relationships and ourselves as individuals'; it helps us understand 'human imperfection' and 'human goodness'; it offers us 'practical rehearsals of life-roles' and 'enriches our emotional life' (pp.54-55). His principles of 'good practice' are dominated by the need for 'physically active' Shakespeare, an approach which he claims will 'change the experience that many youngsters have of Shakespeare in the classroom' (p. 56) without citing any research which demonstrates this. Similarly, Salvatore (2010), who writes from a perspective of teaching and directing both in the UK and in the USA, describes three strategies for overcoming pupils' commonly held 'fear and resistance' (p.379) of Shakespeare. First is the use of process drama[20] which he claims enables students to inhabit the world of the play, whilst building a bridge with their own personal worlds via the experience of being in role; secondly the use of film, including contemporary adaptations; thirdly being able to participate in performances and to experience live theatre. Whilst writing from a more theorised position than Thomas in terms of drama practice, nevertheless Salvatore's specific claim that when it comes to Shakespeare 'only in performance does ...ownership truly happen' (p.387) remains unsupported by empirical evidence.

In fact, apart from teachers' reports (Gibson, 1990) arising out of the Cambridge Shakespeare and Schools Project itself (few of which were set up as rigorous pieces of action research), until recently the only formal investigation into active methods was the RSA Shakespeare in Schools Project carried out in Leicestershire schools in the mid 1990s (Gilmour, 1994). This research project included in its aims: 'to

[20] Process drama is a term used in educational drama, in which themes and ideas are explored through role play, improvisations, tableaux etc (Franks, 2010).

highlight the arts in the curriculum' and 'to improve access for all school pupils' particularly to 'high art' (p.6). It took the form of a collaboration between the local education authority, advisory staff, teachers from participating primary and secondary schools, the RSA itself and a professional theatre in education (TIE) company. Shakespeare was experienced by pupils in lessons (using active methods), workshops, theatre performances, and a special Shakespeare festival. The project, evaluated by academics from De Montfort University, gathered evidence from observations, and interviews with pupils and teachers. The findings suggested a 'strong consensus that Shakespeare should be part of the learning experience of pupils of all ages and abilities' (p.27) amongst participants. Typical comments from teachers were that:

> Students were excited by their ability to understand something called Shakespeare which had previously seemed alien to them and their lives (p.26)

Clearly this project reached out way beyond the boundaries and scope of normal classroom Shakespeare. The level of professional collaboration and resourcing creates problems in attempting to generalise from the project's conclusions. What it did not do was prove the 'effectiveness' of merely introducing 'active methods' into the classroom as a way of teaching a set play (a claim often made for 'active methods', see Thomas above). This gap in research may be addressed by the major RSC 'Stand up for Shakespeare' project set up in 2008. Working jointly with the University of Warwick, part of the RSC's intention is to investigate the effectiveness of 'active methods' and of young people experiencing live theatre, and I discuss some of their work later in this chapter.

With open acknowledgement to Gibson's Shakespeare and Schools Project, James Stredder's textbook for teachers, *The North Face of Shakespeare* (2009), attempts to tackle Shakespeare's 'monumentalism' (p.6) which he says renders Shakespeare awe-inspiringly remote, 'unscaleable' like an 'icy rock face' (p.3). Stredder, a drama specialist, takes off where Gibson's *Teaching Shakespeare* left off, compiling a

comprehensive collection of classroom activities (many culled from Cambridge School Shakespeare editions), but with one key difference in that Stredder theorises active Shakespeare in a more coherent way. As a first step to teaching 'practical' work around a Shakespeare text, for instance, he recommends that teachers need to be 'critical' readers of texts themselves – an approach which 'takes place in shifting cultural contexts...especially in readers' understanding of issues of race, colonialism, gender and sexuality' (p. xix); Stredder's purpose is to write a book 'about Shakespeare, not just about teaching Shakespeare' (p.xxi). Importantly, he says that meaningful practical, activity-based Shakespeare depends upon being underpinned by a coherent theory. Although activities are organised into conventional language, narrative and character section-headings, he deconstructs each concept first. The section on character, for instance, is prefaced by an account of the ways in which an understanding of 'character' has evolved historically as a dramatic and a literary construct. He suggests that a useful way forward is to approach characters as 'roles' (p.196), and for teachers to be clear about the theoretical positions they may be adopting in their classroom work. Not surprisingly, the activities themselves in Stredder's book draw on a wide range of traditions and influences, but Stredder consciously draws attention to this – an aspect which is lacking in many other teacher handbooks. Like Gibson, Stredder treats the plays as scripts, and is at pains to avoid the conventional 'tyranny' and 'authority' of the text. However, Stredder adapts Gibson's claims to be a wholly learner-centred approach, by emphasising the importance of positioning both the reader and the text simultaneously at the centre of the classroom: 'All practical work', he writes, 'is pre-eminently production' (p.14). The problem is that Stredder makes a number of claims for working in this way (for instance, that active Shakespeare 'improves children's general ability to listen and read and speak' (p.16), or that the reader inevitably takes ownership of the process) but without cross-referencing any research data which might support those claims.

A recent addition to the body of 'active Shakespeare' handbooks, this time aimed at primary teachers, commences by posing the question, 'What is the point of

Shakespeare?' (Winston and Tandy, 2012, p.1). In answer, the writers claim that Shakespeare is for everyone, and that teaching Shakespeare improves children's 'language development', their 'creative thinking', 'moral imaginations' and even 'test scores'(p.1). They argue that becoming familiar with Shakespeare at a young age should reduce feelings of alienation when studying at secondary level, thus helping to break down cultural barriers. Activities focus around story and character, an approach which, according to Winston and Tandy, helps primary-aged children make moral and emotional connections with the plays, for example:

> Often the characters find themselves in situations where they need to make choices that are difficult, such as Hamlet; or where they must face the consequences of their choices, such as Brutus or Macbeth (p.4).

To make Shakespeare workable in a primary classroom what the authors appear to be advocating is the necessity of adopting a reductive and decontextualized construction of character, which treats dramatic roles as real people. Primary teachers must take it on trust that these methods 'work'.

Although there have been few actual research projects investigating 'active Shakespeare', it is not difficult to locate articles decrying the limiting effect of the National Curriculum Key Stage 3 SATs test, particularly in the early 1990s when the tests were first introduced (eg., Walton, 1993; LATE, 1995; Coles, 1992; LATE, 1993; Rosen, 1993). In Rex Gibson's (1993a) spirited attack on the 'trivialising experience' (p.79) of the first SATs tests, he accused politicians of converting Shakespeare into 'a dull, joyless, and, narrowly defined comprehension exercise' (p.80) in the reactionary belief they were recreating some sort of 'golden age' of schooling. Subsequently, there were surprisingly few studies specifically of KS3 Shakespeare, although formal evaluations of the SATs undertaken jointly by NATE and one of the teacher unions have on more than one occasion recommended the scrapping of the Shakespeare test and the introduction of teacher assessment instead (see, for instance, ATL et al., 1998). A number of articles appeared in the education press

criticising revisions planned for the 2003 Shakespeare SATs (for example, TES, 2003), but, as I have argued elsewhere, the focus of argument was muddied by the proposed introduction of an additional writing task which was only tangentially connected to the set play (Coles, 2003).

Epitomising the body of literature which is concerned with the practical problem of coercing whole cohorts of fourteen year olds to study a set Shakespeare play is John Haddon's article, 'How can we teach Shakespeare?' (1995). Accessibility frames the answer to the titular question: Haddon claims that active methods treat the texts as playscripts rather than literature to the extent that, regrettable as the SATs tests are, 'it should be possible, with an appropriate approach, for our pupils to take them in their stride' (p.120). He illustrates his discussion with examples of active approaches to plays such as *The Tempest* which clearly owe a debt to the Shakespeare and Schools methods, activities which do little to disrupt traditional readings. For example, one activity constructs Caliban for the students as 'a despised monster who sees a drunkard as god' (p.123). This essentially accommodationist position towards KS3 Shakespeare has remained a constant theme over the intervening decade, one that continues to resurface in the kind of practical articles to be found in professional magazines such as *NATE Classroom*. One such example is that by Richard Spencer, a teacher co-opted by the QCA[21] in 2007 to compile a fresh collection of 'active Shakespeare' materials in a government-sponsored effort to revitalise Shakespeare teaching (and, I suspect, to distract attention away from the arid nature of the SATs tests themselves). His article (Spencer, 2007) is a mixture of expediency ('whatever we think of the tests they are…a reality', p.18), creativity (he has compiled a lively 'ideas bank', p19) and the kind of bizarre claim peculiar to bard-lovers to know what Shakespeare might be thinking today ('Make no mistake, if Shakespeare were alive today he would be teaching Drama', p.18). Whilst expressing profound dislike of the KS3 tests as

[21] The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, a quango set up by the Blair Government to oversee national curriculum and assessment development

'divisive' and 'poorly devised' (p.18), he is at the same time lightly dismissive of any lasting damage to young people's 'self-esteem', in that he claims the test will seem 'inconsequential' to students 'by August' (p.18). Notwithstanding the 'inconsequentiality' of the tests, Spencer has seen fit to organise the ideas bank here and the larger one lodged on the QCA website into categories that exactly match the assessment requirements for the KS3 test for 2007 (p.19).

In contrast, there is a small body of empirically-based research that seeks to use teacher surveys in order to explore the constricting effects of compulsory Shakespeare. John Moss' NATE-sponsored research into the KS3 SATs (Moss, 1997) reported the results of national teacher surveys; while 94% of respondents voiced serious criticisms with SATs tests as a whole, 'the most sustained criticism was reserved for the Shakespeare paper' (p.17). Moss' concluding comments are that:

> The tests affect the way in which pupils perceive what a Shakespeare play is, and how its meanings are made available to a reader, actor or audience' (p.17).

Batho's research (1998) into the effects of compulsory Shakespeare on the English curriculum, its resourcing and teaching methods is likewise based on teacher surveys, in this case across two local education authorities. His findings suggest a shift at that time towards a set scene approach to the year 9 set play, and English departments increasingly looking to introduce Shakespeare to their students in years 7 and 8 as preparation for year 9 study. However, he found that 90% of his respondents agreed with the statement that 'pupils must be involved actively (performance, role play etc) with Shakespeare in lessons' (p.168) and a similar percentage rejecting an external exam as the most appropriate way of assessing pupils' responses. He concludes that there is a danger in the KS3 tests determining the teaching and learning strategies, closing down exploratory possibilities.

As indicated by Batho's research undertaken more than a decade ago, compulsory assessment at KS3 and 4 resulted in Shakespeare taking on increased prominence in departmental programmes of study. Given how much Shakespeare is taught between years 7 to 11, however, there have been surprisingly few studies which attempt to explore what is actually happening in the classroom or which invite students to voice their own thoughts about Shakespeare. In two recent small-scale investigations (Barker, 2003; Bellamy, 2005), the researchers in each case set out to examine a specific aspect of differentiation by collecting data from year 9 Shakespeare lessons. Alison Barker's classroom-based case-study (2003) reveals bottom-set year 9 students being denied even the active approaches which are always promoted as rendering the plays accessible for 'less academic' pupils. From her observations, Barker suggests:

> Bottom set year 9 pupils preparing for their SATs… are not expected to discover a lifelong love of Shakespeare. All the methods selected to teach them have an unsubtle and easily read subtextual message: you cannot understand this (p. 8).

Bellamy's study (2005) focuses on three year 9 'gifted and talented' girls studying *Macbeth* for their SATs. Bellamy combines classroom observation and interviews with the girls, revealing the frustration these high achieving girls have with the conventionally plodding set scene coverage seemingly demanded by the nature of the SATs test. Her intervention strategy of introducing drama-based activities has mixed results, and she concludes that one of the problems with the exam system is the reification of knowledge at the expense of interpretation.

Neither of these studies set out to investigate the teaching of Shakespeare *per se*, and only touch on broader notions of culture and pedagogy (although there are socio-cultural implications in the way setting operates in school). More significant in research terms have been the various reports issuing from joint projects established in 2007 by the RSC and the University of Warwick (Irish, 2008; Neelands et al., 2009; Galloway and Strand, 2010; Thomson et al., 2010; Irish, 2011). The

RSC/University of Warwick's Learning and Performance Network (LPN) is essentially a structured continuing professional development (CPD) initiative offered to schools, drawing on the professional expertise of RSC actors, directors and education staff combined with academic input from university lecturers and researchers. Whilst much of the research evidence gathered from between 2007 and 2009 focuses on the effectiveness of the particular forms of CPD delivery, data collected include quantitative attitudinal surveys of mainly year 10 students across the participating schools, surveys of teachers' views and experiences (both qualitative and quantitative), and Master's level certificated action research projects completed by project teachers themselves. The LPN is clearly an ambitious programme that takes on board pedagogical, academic and professional development concerns, with a broadly social understanding of learning at its heart – suggested in particular by its reference to 'ensemble'[22] and to 'community of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Its overall aims are to:

- develop the pedagogy of ensemble, theatre-based approaches to the teaching and learning of Shakespeare
- develop…understanding of the interpretive choices that actors and directors make in order to access and own Shakespeare's text
- develop confidence in and enjoyment of … learning and performance…
- create a community of practice…

(Galloway and Strand, 2010, p.5)

What is significant in terms of my own research questions, however, is that in its focus on rehearsal room/workshop techniques and pupil motivation, it does not engage with what pupils themselves bring to the classroom or with models of reading, and for me leaves questions of cultural practice largely unanswered. Although student surveys (pre and post intervention) point to raised levels of

[22] Ensemble is defined by Thomson et al (2010) in their evaluation of the LPN as a social, democratic and collaborative site for learning, requiring a degree of commitment from all participants developed over a period of time.

enjoyment and ease of access as a result of the programme (Galloway and Strand, 2010)[23], the authors of the report conclude that,

> The results demonstrate how hard it is to effect change in quite deep-seated negative attitudes to Shakespeare. Because Shakespeare is perceived negatively by many students, interventions often downplay the relationship between the activities and Shakespeare (p.25).

What also complicates drawing any clear conclusions from the survey data and linking it to drama/ensemble-based methods of teaching is that, as with the RSA project discussed above (Gilmour, 1994), the LPN is both a multi-site and multi-agency programme, reaching well beyond the classroom, enriched for instance by periodic regional festivals. The independent evaluation of the LPN (Thomson et al, 2010) highlights the undoubted impact of the programme in terms of teachers' classroom practice, but at the same time notes a tendency for teachers to over-emphasise activities designed to help students' understanding of Shakespeare at plot level. The evaluation authors conclude that greater focus on working at an interpretative level as part of the programme might reduce this tendency. However, Irish (2011) draws attention to one LPN teacher's case study report to emphasise the potential for developing genuinely dialogic classroom practice by teachers taking what may appear to be pedagogic risks based on the 'ensemble' approach to Shakespeare.

One unintended effect of 'active Shakespeare' as a project, it seems to me, therefore is to blur consideration of the way students position themselves as readers. Janet Bottoms (1996) moves closer to a consideration of reading as a socio-cultural activity in her work with primary school children and the use of role-play to explore a Shakespeare playtext. In interviews with the children it becomes apparent that they are quite consciously able to move in and out of roles, entering

[23] The authors emphasise the problems in drawing causal inferences directly from their data

the imagined world of the play, yet retaining a sense of the distinctiveness of this other world.

Where the research focus has been shifted away from methodology (for example, active methods) and onto a broader pedagogic plane, it is possible to investigate classrooms as sites of social interaction, where students are afforded agency (Turvey et al., 2006; Franks et al., 2006; Yandell, 2007). What each of these studies has in common is the assumption that students bring 'multiple repertoires of cultural knowledge' (Turvey et al., 2006, p.62) to classroom Shakespeare and that meanings of texts are constructed dialogically, regardless of whether students are seated at desks or on their feet. Franks and his fellow researchers (2006) observe students actively producing their own texts in the classroom, employing a fusion of English, media and drama in their exploration of *Macbeth*. The students are afforded the opportunity to draw on different kinds of cultural knowledge, including popular culture, to construct meaning for themselves out of the specific Shakespeare play under study. For the writers of this article, the kind of literacy practice described here derives from a multiplicity of 'cultural contexts and the relations between them' (p.77), where students are:

> given space to bring what they know to lessons about Shakespeare, to make and perform texts that are not simply mimetic and iterative, not just playfully engaging in parody...(p.77).

In this classroom Shakespeare is not only constructed as Literature, but also consciously as soap opera, as theatre, as playtext and as school text.

Similarly, through the close multi-modal analysis of a single lesson in the same East London school, Yandell (2007) observes students actively interpreting *Julius Caesar* through the construction of their own joint texts 'instantiated in talk, in movement,

in gesture, in the images of tableaux...' (p.260). Where the observed teacher's practice differs from many of the 'active Shakespeare' proponents', is in the way she decentres the text, and in the way that classroom discourse arises out of the relationship between culture, knowledge, learning and teaching; here, students make connections for themselves between the various elements of the lesson; the teacher does not impose her reading on them. As Turvey et al (2006) comment:

> Telling fourteen year olds what a Shakespeare play means is inadequate in that such a pedagogy is inattentive to the way meanings are made in any and all readings of a text (p.55).

Kress et al.'s major multi-modal investigation into the ways in which English as a school subject is constructed in urban classrooms offers a rather different glimpse of the way in which Shakespeare is produced and reproduced in some classrooms (Kress et al., 2005). As part of the longer 'Production of School English' study researchers observe a series of Shakespeare lessons in two contrasting urban schools. In each case, preparation for formal assessment (GCSE coursework) provides the overarching framework for the series of lessons, with the effect of reducing either *Romeo & Juliet* or *Macbeth* to what the researchers term 'Shakespeare as worksheet' (p.156). Both teachers approach the now entirely fragmented text in a functional way, technically fulfilling the requirements of the exam specification, heavily mediating the scraps of text the students encounter. Despite employing a variety of media (for example, video, drama, historical sources) to teach the texts, the teachers' emphasis not surprisingly falls on surface understanding at the expense of interpretation. What is perhaps more surprising is that in these two multi-ethnic London classrooms neither teacher makes connections with their students' own cultural knowledge; it is simply never raised in lessons, despite the fact that a number of students spontaneously make cross-cultural links between *Romeo & Juliet* and their own lives when interviewed by the researchers.

Complementary to accounts of actual classroom research are commentaries on the historical or ideological relationship between Shakespeare and education. Essentially much of this body of literature attempts to provide a bridge between critical theory (aimed much more at a Higher Education audience) and classroom practice. Heavily indebted to the work of cultural materialists (eg., Dollimore and Sinfield, 1985; Holderness, 1988), Susan Leach (1992) offers a substantial historical overview of Shakespeare in education, taking in a century of governmental reports and examination requirements along the way before turning a critical eye on to the literature components of the then new National Curriculum. The nearly contemporaneous volume edited by Aers and Wheale (1991) covers similar ground, including an introduction by Wheale sharply critical of what he saw at the time as a consciously nationalist and socially divisive agenda behind the introduction of compulsory Shakespeare. Written by teachers and academics from secondary and higher education, this is, however, an eclectic mix of essays, including, for instance, a contribution by Fred Inglis (1991) who provocatively embraces compulsory school Shakespeare as a liberating force for working class youngsters (without suggesting ways in which this transformation might happen). As part of his attack on the 'ideologues' who doubt Shakespeare's 'greatness' (p.58), Inglis deliberately misreads cultural materialist theory as ideologically reductive; he reserves particular venom for his attack on Gary Taylor's cultural history of Shakespearean reinventions (1989) as 'anachronistic silliness' (p. 63). Inglis appears to wilfully ignore the specific cultural challenge that Shakespeare-as-icon presents, what Bottoms (2000, p.11) conceives as the 'familiar ghost of the national psyche'. In doing so, he attempts to perpetuate the myth of universality, that Shakespeare speaks to everyone through the ages and that the message somehow remains unchanged and unchanging.

A more recent version of essays on teaching Shakespeare is that edited by Blocksidge (2003). As with the Aers and Wheale volume, this offers a rather odd

mix of contributions in this case ranging from the ideologically critical (Blocksidge's own historical introduction) to the ideologically naive (for example, Harris' chapter describing classroom practice, 'New town Shakespeare' – see below); Sean McEvoy's analysis of Shakespeare's high cultural capital (McEvoy, 2003) sits rather uncomfortably next to a chapter celebrating how Shakespeare is taught at Eton. Throughout this volume (with the possible exception of McEvoy's discussion of teaching Shakespeare at A Level), ideological critique might be offered at a theoretical level, but when shifting attention to real classrooms writers tend to retreat into the less critical and theoretically rooted arena of 'active methods', or of the practicalities in preparing students for National Tests. Harris (2003) is a good example of this, where her stated departmental aims in teaching Shakespeare closely match the requirements of the Key Stage 3 tests. (Interestingly, a number of the case studies published on the RSC Stand Up for Shakespeare website refer to formal National Curriculum assessment levels as if unproblematic key success criteria, a point picked up as a concern by Thomson et al., 2010, in their evaluation of the LPN programme). As one reviewer of the Blocksidge volume (Beard, 2005) points out, what is missing here is a consideration of reading and culture in the teaching of Shakespeare.

The body of studies which focus on the teaching of post-16 Shakespeare tend to adopt a more critical approach to questions of reading and pedagogy. Mellor and Patterson (2000) explore what 'critical practice' might look like in the classroom. In the light of their own classroom experience, they question classroom practice which merely substitutes conventional readings of Shakespeare with ones which reflect more modern values (for example feminist interpretations of women characters). Instead, adhering to the belief that readings are socially constructed, they shift the centre of interpretation from the what to the how and the why. They place particular significance on disrupting conventional constructions of character as reflecting 'real' people.

McEvoy writes critically of the way the exam system has turned English Literature into a 'heritage subject' (McEvoy, 2003, p.103). He is adamant that Shakespeare poses specific challenges for A Level students in that:

> We read texts as products both of their time and place, and within a discourse which has been created by the historical circumstances in which we find ourselves now (p.102).

Contextual factors for McEvoy include consideration of the effect of enshrining Shakespeare in the National Curriculum further down the school system, which, in contradiction to Inglis, he claims encourages students to revere Shakespeare as a high cultural icon. McEvoy's surveys of student opinion at the end of their A Level course indicate that students feel immense pride at surviving a 'kind of rite of passage' (p.113) in studying Shakespeare. Elsewhere, McEvoy asserts the need to read texts 'inside history and not in some idealized nowhere place' (McEvoy, 2005a, p.8). He rejects the humanist notion of 'personal response' as illusory – even at A Level - in that students' so-called 'personal' responses have been shaped by the teacher's mediation, specific exam requirements, and broader social forces, most of which are commonly unacknowledged. Indeed, Simon Barker's attempt to draw up a 'taxonomy of study guides' (Barker, 1997) demonstrates how narrowly traditional interpretations of Shakespeare plays predominate in a market which supports much A Level study. Janet Bottoms' critique of KS3 and KS4 publishers' materials (Bottoms, 1995) notes the unspoken tensions that exist in most between claims for Shakespeare's 'universality' and the perceived need to explain/translate the archaic language, belief systems and ideas.

Recognising the critical and theoretical gulf between undergraduate and secondary school Shakespeare (even at sixth form level), provides McEvoy (2006) with the impetus to produce a book for new undergraduates, aimed at helping them make a successful transition from 'character, plot and theme' (p.1) to literary approaches deriving from cultural materialism and new historicism. Corroborating this deficit

view of school Shakespeare, a survey undertaken by the Higher Education Academy English Subject Centre (Thew, 2006) indicates a high level of concern amongst university teachers about the preparedness of students for study of Shakespeare at undergraduate level. Key amongst those concerns are: 'students' lack of linguistic, historical and cultural knowledge'; students' 'dangerously self-fulfilling' expectations that Shakespeare will be too hard for them; and that much teaching time needs to be spent in 'unpicking the bad habits' formed through 'character-based criticism' (p.7). However, Hiscock and Hopkins' (2007) handbook on teaching Shakespeare in the higher education context, suggests that pedagogic exchanges are not all one-way traffic. Evidently, some of the Shakespeare and Schools/RSC drama approaches have begun to filter through into the university sector[24]. Strategies include workshop style approaches to the text, and even DARTs style close reading activities (pp.96-105). The whole enterprise is very much concerned with placing Shakespeare as a writer in the context of other early modern playwrights, illuminating the ways in which Shakespearean drama is typical of its period. What is revealing for me as a secondary school practitioner, is Hiscock's declared intention to disrupt students' interpretations of *Macbeth* and *Othello* which have become rather unhelpfully ' "fixed" by early encounters in school' (p.70).

It is ironic that after twenty years of compulsory Shakespeare in the National Curriculum these university and sixth form teachers feel the need to dismantle the deeply conventional construct that is secondary school Shakespeare. In the next section, I want to turn attention to the key literary critical traditions which, according to McEvoy (2003; 2006), Thew (2006) and Hiscock & Hopkins (2007), underpin school Shakespeare.

[24] Also see Olive (2012); Gartside et al (2012); and the website of the RSC/Warwick CAPITAL project: http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/capital

2.2 Critical Traditions (1900-2000)

> *From Johnson to Leavis, a tradition grows up in which the plays are subjected to a powerful normative bias, an imposition of meanings and values as conceived by the dominant ideology*
>
> *(Kiernan Ryan, 2002, p.3)*

The last century has seen certain critical practices which have become established as common sense approaches to literary texts, institutionalised in schools and through the exam system. In order to make sense of the way Shakespeare texts have been commonly constructed within the exam system (see next section), in study guides and school editions of the plays, first I want to provide a brief overview of key critical currents relevant to educational practice. Critical theory upheavals of the 1980s (the 'culture wars', see Kamps, 1991; Graff, 1992; Bristol, 1996) were mainly centred in academia, since when there has developed a widening disparity between literary approaches in the Higher Education sector and those of the school sector (Hiscock and Hopkins, 2007; Thew, 2006) as indicated in the previous section. From the perspective of teaching undergraduates fresh from A level study, Stern (2003, p.132) argues that 'much classroom teaching of Shakespeare is now 100 years behind current criticism'. Bottoms (1995) argues that any contemporary discussion of what is signified by 'Shakespeare' must take account of these tensions and contradictions. In order to illustrate how the main approaches work I want to apply each in turn to a specific play: for my purposes, *Othello* provides a perfect example of a play which has been significantly reinterpreted over the past century, particularly in the light of post-colonial and feminist criticism.

2.2.1 Character study: Bradley and Victorian individualism: Echoing a famous joke in a 1926 edition of *Punch* (cited in Taylor, 2003, p.329), educational commentator Robert Spooner provocatively entitled an article 'Why Shakespeare failed CSE English' (Spooner, 1981). Spooner's explanation is, of course, because Shakespeare 'hadn't studied Bradley' (p.270). The joke rests on a shared recognition of the

ubiquitous nature of A.C.Bradley's character study approach, promoted in the now classic publication, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, first published in 1904. The lasting influence of Bradley is such that in Terence Hawkes' (1986) estimation:

> Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* almost functions, through a system of universal education which has established the study of Shakespeare as its linchpin, as part of the air we breathe (p.31)

Indeed, in the way that versions of Bradley's character studies found their way into late twentieth century school texts, revision guides and popular Shakespeare commentaries (Bottoms, 1995), Hawkes is probably right, in *That Shakespeherian Rag* (1986), when he plays with the notion that Shakespeare and Bradley have become almost indistinguishable as texts. This is a notion that gains particular potency in the context of school examinations, which I explore in the following section.

Part of Shakespeare's 'genius' has long been popularly seen as his ability to create and then inhabit the minds of a huge range of heroes and villains. Jonathan Bate (1997) reminds us that Keats used the term 'negative capability' to refer to what he saw as Shakespeare's supreme ability to negate any print of his own personality on the work; he becomes the characters he creates, a kind of literary and creative 'chameleon' (Bate, 1997, p.330). The method of approaching a Shakespeare play primarily through its characters developed in the early part of the eighteenth century, and reached its zenith during the Romantic and Victorian periods. A focus on character as a strategy provided an appropriate vehicle for Matthew Arnold's moral crusade in its desire to draw spiritually uplifting lessons from English Literature. Moreover, the Victorian era also produced and feted theatre actor-managers, focusing attention on the celebrated actor in the starring role and how he delivered Shakespeare's great soliloquies (O'Toole, 1990). Seen in this context, Bradley's turn of the century contribution to literary criticism is very much of its time, and yet, as recent accounts of classroom practice attest (eg., Kress et al.,

2005) it continues to hold a particularly tenacious grip on interpretive practices in twenty-first century schools, and as indicated in the previous section, reflects one of the criticisms emerging from the HEA report into the teaching of Shakespeare (Thew, 2006).

One of the reasons for the sustained popularity of *Shakespearean Tragedy* may be the accessible style in which it is written. As a collection of Bradley's university lectures, the book is divided into short chapters each devoted to a separate play or character. John Dixon (1991) draws attention to Bradley's active engagement with the radical University Extension movement, which sought to broaden access to higher education. As an Extension movement lecturer, Bradley not only aimed to establish a more dynamic teacher-student relationship, but was an early pioneer in seeking to break with the Classics model of teaching and reading which threatened to strangle the newly created subject of English with its stodgy philological approach:

> When the average pupil and the average [school] teacher find a play treated by the editor merely as a text for verbal interpretation and discussion, a hundred pages in length, they are tempted to forget that the play is anything beside this and they rise from the study of it without ever having studied it as the thing it is – a dramatic poem (Bradley, 1889, cited in Dixon, p.29)

Bradley's lectures therefore involved reading parts of the plays aloud. In focusing on the main characters, Bradley was able to bring the text alive and thus breathe life into English as an academic subject.[25] However, Bradley had been an academic philosopher before he became an English professor, and his approach to Jacobean

[25] In the nineteenth century there was a strong tradition of what might be called 'working-class' Shakespeare, including the promotion of popular performances of particular plays (eg., Ira Aldridge as Othello in the East End of London). Shakespeare was seen to have emerged from humble origins, so symbolised the 'man of people'. In this capacity, he offered a challenge to the cultural elite (McEvoy, 2005b). Ironically, Bradley unwittingly played a part in the twentieth century process which established Shakespeare as a key component of the expanding University/school sectors' English curriculum, took it out of the hands of amateur enthusiasts and auto-didacts in order to produce respectable, professional teachers of Shakespeare (Taylor, 2003).

tragedy fuses Hegelian philosophy with Aristotelian aesthetics (Desmet, 2003). For Bradley, therefore, the actions and ensuing sufferings of the hero figure directly lead us to learn some important moral lessons, 'universal truths', about the nature of human existence:

> The centre of the tragedy therefore may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from character, or in character issuing in action (Bradley, 1904, p.7).

Dramatic conflict is individualised as 'quite naturally conceived as lying between two persons, of whom the hero is one' (p.10). The hero is often torn by an inward struggle which for Bradley emphasises the 'fact that this action is essentially the expression of character' (p.13).

Unlike Keats, part of Bradley's purpose is to attempt to recreate what was actually in Shakespeare's head at the point of composition. Much of his interpretation is therefore framed by a desire to pinpoint authorial intention:

> …to increase our understanding and enjoyment of these works as dramas; to learn to apprehend the action and some of the personages of each with a somewhat greater truth and intensity, so that they may assume in our imaginations a shape a little less unlike the shape they wore in the imagination of their creator (Bradley, 1904, p.xiii)

Bradley talks of readers who 'know Shakespeare well and come into real contact with his mind' (p.16). However, Bradley accepts that there are limitations in this quest:

> we are to be content with his *dramatic* view, and are not to ask whether it corresponded exactly with his opinions or creed outside his poetry (p.2)

At times, Bradley's obsessive desire to iron out what might be seen as imperfections or inconsistencies in the plays (for example the time-scheme in *Othello*) takes him far beyond the boundaries of the text into speculative realms

which reveal his view of language as an unambiguously expressive medium which reflects rather than constructs reality. Seeking a literal explanation for the plays' various 'defects', for example, Bradley suggests that on stage contradictions probably would not be noticed:

> [Shakespeare] was often, no doubt, over-worked and pressed for time. He knew that the immense majority of his audience were incapable of distinguishing between rough and finished work. He often felt the degradation of having to live by pleasing them… (p.58).

This Victorian quest for order and clarity, however, leads to some internal inconsistency in Bradley's own analysis. On the one hand, Bradley asserts that heroes are 'exceptional beings' whose 'sufferings are of an unusual kind' (p.13), yet at the same time he claims that the plays deal in 'universal truths' about human nature. Shakespeare's use of language is both to be regretted for being 'pestered with metaphors' (p.57), and to be lauded. Although Shakespeare, coming from a humble background, showed 'a comparative want of learning' (p.58),

> where his power of art is fully exerted it really does resemble that of nature…when you dissect it and apply it to the test of a microscope, still you find in it nothing formless, general or vague, but everywhere structure, character, individuality (p.60).

2.2.2 Bradley on *Othello*: Viewed through the paradigm of Aristotelian tragedy, Othello's tragic flaw is jealousy:

> the animal in man forcing itself into his consciousness in naked grossness, and he writhing before it but powerless to deny it entrance…finding relief only in a bestial thirst for blood (p.144)

At a cosmic level 'such jealousy as Othello's converts human nature into chaos, and liberates the beast in man' (p.144). For Bradley, the focus is on Othello as the tragic hero, rather than on Iago's plotting. However, in order to justify Othello's apparent gullibility, Bradley spins his own narrative around Iago as a Mephistophelean figure. Bradley speculates what motivates Iago: to understand him as no ordinary person we must look 'closely into Iago's inner man' (p.178), a place where Bradley detects desire for advancement and the sense of power in seeing his rivals destroyed.

Although Bradley rejects crudely racist interpretations of Othello as a half civilised barbarian who 'retains beneath the surface the savage passions of his Moorish blood' (p.151) underneath the thin veneer of Venetian culture, his reasons for doing so centre on how 'un-Shakespearean' such a portrayal would be – for instance, in other plays Bradley argues that Shakespeare doesn't make his Romans realistically Roman. Working within a late nineteenth century conception of culture and identity, Bradley is adamant that Othello's 'race' is not significant when considering his character. Yet he conceives of the heroic Othello in romanticised terms, and emphasises the alien and exotic: 'He does not belong to our world, and he seems to enter it we know not whence – almost as if from wonderland…' (p.152); 'So he comes before us, dark and grand, with a light upon him from the sun where he was born…' (p.153)

In order to construct a properly tragic hero, Bradley must deny Othello's rather sudden jealous feelings; he produces an unconvincing argument that Othello's jealousy only surfaces when finally pushed over the edge by Iago mid-way through Act 3 - an interpretation ridiculed by Leavis (1952). However, by insisting on a realist approach to 'character', Bradley cannot avoid the conclusion that Othello is, ultimately, not very clever, his judgement easily clouded by emotion (p.154). Bradley suggests that Othello's ignorance of European women (as if a homogeneous group) is a factor in his downfall. In a footnote Bradley struggles to express a sense of the potential for cultural misunderstandings between

Desdemona and Othello ('if the reader has ever chanced to see an African violently excited…' p.157), a line of reasoning that very much betrays *Shakespearean Tragedy* as a product of its time. Although Bradley rejects Coleridge's and Lamb's discussions about Othello's ethnic origins, he still manages to get embroiled in questions of 'race' and representation. Using evidence from words in the script and from references to Black characters in other Shakespeare plays (eg Aaron the Moor in *Titus Andronicus*), Bradley concludes that Othello must be Black not Arabic. But when faced with the question as to whether the part should be played as Black in the theatre, Bradley is adamant that 'we do not like the real Shakespeare' and like Lamb, suggests that we need to protect our imagination from the image of a 'coal-black' Othello, otherwise an 'aversion of our blood…would overpower our imagination…' (footnote, p.165). Where Bradley departs from Lamb is in refusing to apportion blame to Desdemona (Lamb echoes Gratiano's misogynistic attempt to blame the victim on discovering the murdered Desdemona in Act 5).

In fact Bradley seems to be smitten with his vision of the 'adorable' and 'radiant' Desdemona, a vision which attunes with polite Victorian myths of ideal womanhood:

> she is helpless because her nature is infinitely sweet and her love absolute… Desdemona's suffering is like that of the most loving of dumb creatures tortured without cause by the being he adores (p.145)

This version of Desdemona is in tune with popular Victorian primers for girls which drew moral lessons from idealised portraits of Shakespearean heroines (Evans, 1989). In drawing attention to the 'passive and defenceless' Desdemona (p.166) of the second half of the play, Bradley reduces his problem in dealing with the rather different Desdemona of the first Act, who shows no fear of speaking out publicly in Venice's council chamber, marries a Black man in secret, and openly expresses sexual desire. Developing this line of argument, Alan Sinfield wryly remarks, 'It is almost as if the Wife of Bath were reincarnated as Griselda' (1992, p.53). Bradley

makes little comment about the assertive and independent young woman of Act 1, apart from briefly censuring her and sympathising with 'the old man who could not survive his daughter's loss'. (p.166). Once married, though, she mysteriously regains 'that heavenly purity of heart which men worship…' (p.164). By contrast, Emilia attracts little comment apart from the fact that she 'sets one's teeth on edge' (p.196). Emilia is brushed aside for being 'vulgar' and 'destitute of imagination' (p.196). Her talk about the infidelity of wives (Act 4, sc.3), therefore, cannot be taken seriously. Her one positive deed is dying at the end when she apparently attains some sort of grace: 'Why should she live?' asks Bradley (p.200) rather dismissively.

Clearly, neither Emilia nor Desdemona 'deserve' to meet violent deaths. This problem highlights the limitation of Bradley's concept of the 'tragic flaw': in the moral universe of the play, the evil live (Iago) while the innocent perish through no fault of their own. In its crusade to reveal a moral lesson about the nature of human life, Bradley's approach has to isolate one or two main characters from the rest of the play, narrowing our view of the play as a whole and simplifying the source of conflict; the moral conclusion thus emphasises the metaphysical rather than the social. Moreover, Bradley's method of focusing attention on one character at a time for detailed interpretation, has tended to naturalise a masculine view of Shakespearean tragedy (given that Bradley takes the main characters in most cases to be male roles) and to minimise the dramatic importance of the interplay between characters on stage, particularly women. In this way the murdered figure of Emilia with her outspoken opinions on marriage and fidelity can be reduced to mere collateral damage.

Why we cling on to a Victorian concept of character in today's classrooms is an interesting question. Despite significant critical interventions in the 1930s from F. R. Leavis (see below), L. C. Knights (eg. , 1933) and theatre historians such as Muriel Bradbrook (1935), as already discussed character study has remained a dominant

mode of critical approach in the school sector. Historically, there is little justification for this pre-occupation. There is strong evidence to suggest that in Shakespeare's day the Victorian notion of 'character' as a unified human subject would not have existed. The word 'characterisation' does not appear in a theatrical context until the mid nineteenth century (O'Toole, 1990). Bradbrook (1935), suggests that Elizabethan dramatic characters are inherited from medieval stock types, a lingering belief in 'humours' combined with Aristotelian hero-figures. It is therefore unlikely that it was the psychological development of an individual person which interested Elizabethan audiences, rather the interplay of characters, their situations and the debate of ideas. Alan Sinfield (1992) adopts the term 'dramatis personae' instead of characters to draw attention to what he suggests are consciously constructed character effects in Shakespeare's plays, distinguishable from Bradley's 'essentialist humanism' where the self is regarded 'as autonomous, self-constituting, and self-sufficient, and as the uniquely valid source of meaning and truth' (op cit, p.62). Developing this idea, Sinfield proposes understanding these figures as representations of men and women situated 'at the intersection of discourses and historical forces' (p.63); they are written so as to give an impression of interiority and an ability to develop over the events of the play, an understanding of subjectivity which Sinfield argues is consistent with ideas of the self emerging from Elizabethan Protestantism. However, this concept of 'character' is no more than a dramatic 'strategy' (Sinfield, p.78), subordinate when necessary to the development of ideas in a play; so, for instance, dramatis personae such as Othello or Desdemona, both with core inconsistencies, can each be seen as sites of contesting ideologies, representing contradictory attitudes within the play itself. If we understand Shakespeare's tragedies as reflecting a society on the brink of turbulent political and social change, where characters are caught up between two opposing world views (O'Toole, 1990; Ryan, 2002; Rosen, 2004), then there is no need to seek tortuous explanations in order to smooth over gaps and what would be deemed inconsistencies in 'real' people who have the capacity to step out of the world of the play.

2.2.3 Close textual analysis: Leavis and the *Scrutiny* movement: In contrast with what might be seen as Bradley's earlier attempts to democratise the academic study of Shakespeare, as I outlined in Chapter 1 Leavis and his *Scrutiny* colleagues formulated a more elitist version of English in which Shakespeare's writing embodies a creative blossoming which can only be appreciated by those with sufficiently sensitive minds who have undergone training in the *Scrutiny* method of close reading. The transformative power of 'great literature' was seen as a crucial humanising weapon in their crusade against the corroding effect of commercial culture in advanced industrial society:

> The fact remains that literature – and for Englishmen English Literature above all – is one of the great humanising agencies (Knights, 1958, p.166).

The introduction of a literary heritage at both university and grammar-school levels ('The Great Tradition') was meant to re-establish stability and tradition, by means of educating a select minority (Mathieson, 1975).

Leavis rejected Bradley's engaged subjective response to Shakespeare and claimed that the Scrutiny method was truly objective. One of Leavis' best-known collections of essays, *The Common Pursuit* (1952), takes its title from T.S.Eliot's belief that 'the critic…should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices…in the common pursuit of true judgement' (cited in Leavis, 1952, p.v). In his essay, 'Literature and Society', Leavis further explains the model of reading suggested by the Eliot quotation, and explores the relationship between literary studies and society. The ideological nature of the *Scrutiny* project is revealed more explicitly here than in much of Leavis' work: literary study, he says, is 'something accessible only to the reader capable of intelligent and sensitive criticism', which in turn 'requires an uncommon skill, the product of a kind of training that few readers submit themselves to' (*ibid*. p.193). Leavis counters Marxist approaches to literature by claiming that 'human life lives only in individuals: I might have said, the truth that it is only in individuals that society lives' (*ibid.* p.185). The only social contexts that Leavis acknowledges are those connected to literary traditions, with the result, for

example, that he views William Blake's poetry purely in terms of the work of 'creative springs in the individually experiencing mind' reacting against Augustan literary forms (*ibid.* p.186). Blake's place in a politically dissenting tradition, an artist shaped by a tumultuous period of social upheaval in London and in France (see, for instance, Cox, 2004), is thus completely side-stepped.

Leavis and his *Scrutiny* followers rejected character study and the search for 'perfect verisimilitude to life', preferring to see characters as symbols within a larger poetic vision (Knight, 1949, p.15). In a now famous essay, *How many children had Lady Macbeth?,* L. C. Knights categorically declares that 'a Shakespeare play is a dramatic poem' (p.7) and warns: 'if the razor-edge of sensibility is blunted at any point we cannot claim to have read what Shakespeare wrote…' (1933, p.32). Being distracted by 'abstractions' such as character and plot construction, or straying beyond the text are both examples of the way in which a reader's sensibility might be 'blunted':

> The main difference between good and bad critics is that the good critic points to something that is actually contained in the work of art, whereas the bad critic points away from the work in question; he introduces extraneous elements into his appreciation – smudges the canvas with his own point (*ibid.* p.33).

Knights argues that Elizabethan drama, in its adherence to particular stage conventions and its historical debt to Morality plays, was conceived in a non-naturalistic way, drawing attention to language rather than character or action:

> …the total response to a Shakespeare play can only be obtained by an exact and sensitive study of the quality of the verse, of the rhythm and imagery, of the controlled associations of the words and their emotional and intellectual force, in short by an exact and sensitive study of Shakespeare's handling of language (p.17).

A genuinely intelligent and sensitive reader would uncover the inherent meaning of the text by means of close attention to its verbal detail, a belief that presupposes a

similarly intelligent and sensitive author who has consciously laid down these verbal clues. As Drakakis (1985) suggests, there is a fundamental contradiction in this still widely-held view of the reader:

> …at once exercising the razor-edge of sensibility by which a Shakespearian text can be possessed, while at the same time receiving passively the imprint of the structure laid down by the authoritative artist, whose fullness of utterance resides exclusively in the 'exact words of the poem concerned' (p.20).

2.2.4 Leavis on *Othello*

Leavis' essay on *Othello*, 'Diabolic intellect and the noble hero' (1952), is sub-titled 'the sentimentalist's Othello', a pointed attack on Bradley's analysis of Othello as a noble and heroic figure destroyed by the 'devilish cunning' of Iago (Leavis, p.137). Leavis essentially argues that Othello is 'egotistic' to the point of being 'self-centred and self-regarding…' (p.145). The noble language which Bradley admires in Othello's speeches, Leavis sees as 'self-approving self-dramatisation' (p.142). As to Othello's jealousy, Leavis cites examples taken from Othello's responses to Iago's initial hints in Act 3, sc.3 to demonstrate that Othello is immediately hooked by Iago – that it takes no time at all for Othello's inherent jealousy to be tweaked into life. For Leavis the tragedy is bound up in the doomed Othello-Desdemona relationship, Iago merely being 'a necessary piece of dramatic mechanism' (p.138). Leavis concedes that Iago is a 'character' only in that he needs to be convincing enough as a person in order to perform his dramatic function.

For me the real problem with Leavis' method is revealed in the way he conceives of Othello. Language rich in metaphor which to Bradley signals nobility in the speaker, sets off altogether a different chain of associations for Leavis. Recurring words in the Leavis analysis of Othello are: 'pride', 'sensual possessiveness', 'appetite…' (p.145). At a surface level Othello's 'race' or culture is dismissed as irrelevant apart from visually 'emphasising the disparity of the match' (p.142). For all of Leavis' claims to rigour in his attention to the language of the text, he manages to ignore

the recurrent racist abuse and allusions to 'race' which permeate the script, right from Iago's words to Brabantio in the opening scene (eg. 'the thick-lips', 'black ram', 'the devil') through to the point at which Othello adopts similar language about himself (eg. 'Her name…is now begrimed and black as mine own face…', 3:3: 389-91). And, indeed, Othello's 'colour' is hardly ignored by other speakers. For instance, the black-white opposition at the centre of the play's language is introduced very early on by the Duke in Act 1, who attempts to pacify Brabantio with the comment that Othello 'is far more fair than black' (1:3:291). Leavis' remarks about Othello's 'characteristic voluptuousness' (p.149), associated by Leavis with 'ugly vindictive jealousy' (p.147), are reminiscent of Iago's own comments about the 'lascivious Moor' (1:1:125), comments based on the 'myth of the Black man's rampant sexuality' (Okri, 1988, p.15).[26] Fryer's history of Black people in Britain (1984) makes it clear that Shakespeare would have been able to draw on a recognisable racist stereotype.

Focusing on 'the words on the page' in an artificially created vacuum ignores the social histories of both reader and writer. What Leavis fails to appreciate is that his razor-edged sensibility is socially and historically situated and there is nothing 'natural' about it. His embracing of Eliot's claim to ideological neutrality in pursuit of an untainted 'truth' is exposed as a sham if Leavis' reading of *Othello* is itself scrutinised in the light of post-colonial consciousness. An instructive example arises out of Laurence Olivier's performance as Othello on the London stage in the 1960s. Olivier enacted Leavis' reading of Othello as an egotistical man in love with himself;

[26] Imperial assumptions of the inferiority of people with Asian or African-Caribbean heritage are summarised by Sheila Patterson (1963, cited in Sinfield, 2004, p144):

> A coloured skin, especially when combined with Negroid features, is associated with alienness, and with the lowest social status. Primitiveness, savagery, violence, sexuality, general lack of control, sloth, irresponsibility – all these are part of the image. On the more favourable side, Negroid peoples are often credited with athletic, artistic and musical gifts, and with an appealing and childlike simplicity which is in no way compatible with the remainder of the image.

These assumptions bear an uncanny similarity with those reflected within Leavis' essay.

extracts from Leavis' 'Diabolic intellect' essay (see above) were reprinted in the accompanying National Theatre programme. Blacked up and mimicking African speech patterns, Olivier's performance of a barely-civilised, overtly sexual black man was almost universally hailed for its technical mastery by white middle-class critics, and regarded subsequently by many as the definitive Othello (eg., Wine, 1984) – even very recently in the liberal press (Coveney, 2011). Yet, from the perspective of a post-colonial cultural analysis of performance history, Barbara Hodgdon notes:

> Olivier's Othello confirms an absolute fidelity to white stereotypes of blackness and to the fantasies, cultural as well as theatrical, that such stereotypes engender. Such impersonation…deflects analysis by aligning racist ideology with theatrical pleasure (Hodgdon, 2004, p. 194).

The Black actor, Hugh Quarshie, recounts playing the role of Othello as a fourteen year-old pupil in a predominantly white school. He was encouraged to play the part in the manner of Olivier, what he now sees in hindsight as a 'grotesque absurdity', the 'equivalent of a Black man telling Rastus jokes' (Quarshie, 2000, p.289).

In his myopic focus on the page, Leavis is able to ignore the references to 'race' in a way which spectators in a theatre cannot do, confronted as they are by a visible representation of the words. Leaving aside his contribution to the debate about Othello's precise ethnic provenance, Ben Okri's account of watching a live performance as 'practically the only Black person in the audience…' (Okri, 1988, p.9) is enough to change his mind about C.L.R. James' view that *Othello* is not a play about race: 'Any Black man who has gone out with a white woman knows that there are a lot of Iagos around' (p.15). Okri's particular razor-edged sensibility, constructed as it is by his specific social and cultural history, leads him to conclude, 'If it did not begin as a play about race, then its history has made it one' (p.9). Just as Okri feels isolated and vulnerable in the largely white audience, so he becomes acutely conscious of Othello's isolation as the only Black person on stage. For Okri, Othello's eventual violent disintegration is understandable in the context of slavery,

alienation and Othello's rise through the military ranks – 'at what cost?' (p.13). He detects 'repressed rage' in Othello, a response hidden by readers' conventional appreciation of Othello's 'nobility' and exoticism, what Okri calls 'white people's satisfaction at having 'neutralised the Black man' (p.13). As Jyotsna Singh (2004, p.173) comments, 'overall, the Western literary tradition, until recently, has inevitably judged Othello as heroic only in terms of qualities that are considered Western, Venetian, Christian and 'civilised'.

Such readings directly challenge Leavis' ideas about experience and feeling. Textual analysis underpinned by neither a social theory of language nor a dynamic model of reading merely privileges one specific interpretation over that of another differently situated reader. Leavis' assumption is that everyone shares his 'universal' and 'timeless' values, in other words that Western middle-class values are somehow neutral and natural. Yet times change and society's values change. Dominant beliefs about witchcraft or science, for instance, in the England of James I were evidently not the same as in Leavis' time. Socially acceptable attitudes to 'race' and culture have clearly developed considerably since Leavis was writing in the 1950s, and liberal literary critics would find it difficult to defend a reading of *Othello* which took no cognisance of post-colonial writings by influential commentators such as Edward Said (eg., 1978).

For much of the latter part of the twentieth century approaches to *Othello* have been polarised between Bradley and Leavis, both in their different ways and for different reasons producing a character-based interpretation (even Leavis, it seems to me, is forced to adopt Bradley's agenda in the very act of refutation). Emphasis on language or on individual characters which excludes any consideration of the social or historical context of the works obscures the role of society and culture in the formation of literature and its meanings. Leavis and the *Scrutiny* movement's attention to language, however, found its natural successor in late twentieth century Post-structuralist 'textuality', where meaning is taken to be located

primarily within discourse. Ultimately, in leaving texts to float free from their historical context and modes of production, these seemingly diverse approaches are unable to account for Shakespeare's remarkable 'afterlife' or, as Michael Bristol puts it, 'our extended historical dialogue with Shakespeare's works' (Bristol, 1996, p.xii), apart from the metaphysical assertion of textual value and universal truths.

2.2.5 Materialist readings:

> *Education has taken as its brief the socialization of students into these criteria, while masking this project as the achievement by talented individuals (for it is in the program that most should fail) of a just and true reading of texts that are just and true. A cultural materialist practice will review the institutions that retell the Shakespeare stories, and will attempt also a self-consciousness about its own situation within those institutions (Alan Sinfield, 1992, p.51)*

Drawing together my analysis of cultural practice from Chapter 1 and an ideological understanding of 'reading a text', I want to argue that materialist criticism offers a way of recognising and confronting the seductive power that Shakespeare wields as a proponent of a particular set of cultural and ideological values. Heavily indebted to Williams' dialectical model of culture (Williams, 1981), cultural materialism is based upon the premise that culture cannot transcend the material forces and relations of production, both in terms of the play's historical context and the institutions through which Shakespeare continues to be reproduced (Dollimore and Sinfield, 1985). Contrary to popular misconception, materialists do not dismiss Shakespeare as simply 'elitist', nor do they reduce the texts to a crude determinism (Joughin, 2005). Rather they insist on broadening out the questions asked of each text – beyond the narrow terms of plot, theme, character and a view of language as an enclosed system. Marx himself, far from wishing to reject Shakespeare as 'bourgeois', famously embraced Shakespeare as one of his favourite writers. His daughter, Eleanor, reflected that, 'As to Shakespeare, he was the Bible of our

house, seldom out of our hands or mouths' (Baxandall and Morawski, 1973, p.149). Marx enjoyed, above all:

> precisely the hybridity which had led Voltaire to call Shakespeare a drunken savage. In opposition to Voltaire, Marx praised Shakespearean drama for 'its peculiar mix of the sublime and the base, the terrible and the ridiculous, the heroic and the burlesque' (Stallybrass, 2001, p.20)

The contradictions and sheer vitality Marx delights in are part of the dialectic method that Shakespeare uses, where opposing viewpoints clash and fierce debates about the way society should be run are played out (Rosen, 2004). Instead of the impression Tillyard's scholarly account of the medieval belief in divine order gives (Tillyard, 1963), historically Shakespeare's world was in a state of flux: 'it is the drama of human beings breaking out of the circle of destiny and divine planning and finding their humanity in forging the world' (Gonzalez, 1992, p.xii). Hero-figures are torn between opposing social, theological, ideological systems where the exercising of free will brings both liberation and destruction. It is this developing consciousness which gives the plays so much dramatic power. Marxist critics, such as Paul Siegel (1992), encourage readers or spectators to pose two key questions about Shakespeare's plays: firstly, what historical moment produced the work; secondly, what new meanings emerge when each successive period reappropriates the work. The first of these questions leads us to make links with Shakespeare's theatre and social world, in order to understand the interplay between the work of art and the society which shaped it - not to perpetuate the *Shakespeare in Love* myth of 'merrie England', nor to accept the 'universal values' line of argument. The necessity of asking the second question is made clear by, for instance, Gary Taylor's *Reinventing Shakespeare* (1989), which provides a detailed account of the way Shakespeare's body of work has been produced and reproduced across four centuries, at specific historical moments times his reputation politically manufactured to provide a particular version of Englishness and nationalistic values. As Ryan (2002, p.15) comments, 'A Shakespeare text is not a final product of its age, but a productive practice of both its moment and our own'. Translated into an educational context, a good example of what a small part of this might look

like is found in Bronwyn Mellor's secondary school text-book, *Reading Hamlet* (1989), where Bradley's character study of Gertrude is itself offered for students to deconstruct as a text with its own history and relationship to its manner of production.

As Bristol makes abundantly clear from the title of his account of Shakespeare's extraordinary cultural stamina, *Big-time Shakespeare* (1996), Shakespeare is almost unique in that his reputation has not only achieved canonical status within an academic context, but has also attained 'celebrity' status, constructed and sustained in contemporary popular culture. I would argue that critiques which take no cognisance of this complex, multi-layered cultural history (and the ideological interests at stake) are inadequate to make any real sense of Shakespeare's texts (and why they appear, for instance, as compulsory components of the secondary school National Curriculum in England and Wales). Contrary to criticism from those who would wish to retain an uncritically reverential attitude to Shakespeare, this does not detract from any potential enjoyment in the stories and words of the original text or script, not does it reduce the texts to mere historical documents. As Trotsky emphasised:

> A work of art should, in the first place, be judged by its own law, that is, by the law of art. But Marxism alone can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history; in other words, who it was who made a demand for such an artistic form and not for another, and why (Trotsky, 1960, p.178)

It is the very richness of Shakespeare's scripts which has produced the huge variety of textual interpretations published over the last century. How can we explain that on the one hand ex-Conservative Minister Nigel Lawson can claim that *Coriolanus* embodies Conservative Party doctrine: 'Shakespeare was a Tory without any doubt' (cited in Foot, 1990, p.237); while on the other, the Marxist playwright, Bertolt Brecht, admired the very same play for its dialectics of the class struggle

(Willett, 1964)? The literature of Shakespeare is quite clearly an ideologically contested site of cultural production. Because Shakespeare's texts were produced at a time of enormous social and philosophical upheaval, they reflect the ferocious contemporary debates about how human beings relate to the world. Opposing views are put into the mouths of different characters; people act according to conflicting social laws and ideological beliefs; resolution at the end of the plays is often fragile, to say the least. The scope for interpretation is wide open. How we make sense of a century of academic textual in-fighting, it seems to me, is to be absolutely clear that literature – and the institution we call 'Shakespeare' - cannot be separated out from political, cultural and economic interests. That even, according to Hawkes, Shakespeare has been reinterpreted and reconstituted so much that the texts cease to mean anything in themselves, but mean whatever we want them to (Hawkes, 1992). Adopting a materialist approach to the plays is not to simply substitute reactionary appropriations with a left-leaning interpretation. I am not advocating the forcing of a propagandist 'reading' on young people in school instead of the Bradley/Leavis amalgam so often found there. What I think the materialist approach offers is transparency: the inherently political nature of 'interpretation' is declared openly, in contrast to quasi-mystical claims that literature only operates on an aesthetic level, untainted by ideological interests. Conflict and contradiction abound in the plays, giving rise to gaps and uncertainties in the texts. A real advance in educational 'readings' of Shakespeare would be in avoiding the attempt to create coherent, seamless wholes out of individual plays, reducing the text to selective accounts of its themes, images and characters.

2.2.6 Reading Theories

The relevance of apparently abstruse interpretations of literary texts to a teacher tackling *Othello* or *Macbeth* with a challenging class of fourteen-year olds might at first seem questionable. Yet what separates the main theoretical modes of reading a literary text, broadly speaking, is a distinction dependent on whether reader or text is regarded as the prime generator of meaning(s). Put another way, are the pupils or the texts at the pedagogical centre of the classroom? Is reading to be

regarded as a technical skill 'mastered' by means of individual apprenticeship? Or is reading conceived of as a social practice, with readings, particularly of Shakespeare, produced differentially within often competing discourses? The answers to these questions are crucial factors, for example, in the way a teacher decides to organise her classroom; or at a macro level, in the way the National Curriculum constructs the relationship between learners and the body of knowledge we call English Literature.

Whereas approaches to literary criticism of the Romantic period tended to take literature to be a reflection of the author's own intentions and experiences (as with Bradley), those of the middle part of the twentieth century tended to refocus attention onto the literary work itself (as illustrated above with reference to Leavis). In both cases, the role of the reader in making meaning out of texts is ignored. The most pervasive theory of reading is the one largely inherited from 'New Criticism', based on the premise that all meaning is derived from the authoritative text itself. For devotees of 'New Criticism' the business of uncovering a poem's meaning is to produce an apparently objective response, systematically exposing the web of literary devices so cunningly constructed by the author through close reading. Dias and Hayhoe (1988) point out the irony that Richards' *Practical Criticism* (1929), which was to be so influential in developing the *Scrutiny* method, should initially direct attention to the part readers play in (mis)interpreting a text – and even pave the way for reader response theorists (Rosenblatt, 1994, 1978). In his attempt to map out undergraduates' 'principal obstacles and causes of failure' in locating the meaning of a poem, Richards cites readers' own 'emotional reverberations' and assumptions as key factors (1929, p.13). Taking this approach, the role of a reader is conceived as a 'passive recipient' of the text (Rosenblatt, 1994, 1978, p.4), a normative view of interpretation dependent on a presumed set of shared beliefs, where apprentice readers must learn to respond in ways almost identical to their masters. As Dias and Hayhoe (1988, p.7) comment, in school practice this means the teacher becomes the 'keeper of the poem' whilst 'the pupils only rent it'. Given the Leavises' promulgation of their close reading method by means of

teacher training as well as university degrees, this model of reading is still commonly found to underpin examination questions and as the 'default' mode of many English teachers. But literary texts are only ink marks on paper until activated through the process of reading, by readers who have their own social and cultural histories; furthermore, post-Saussurian linguistic theory has established an understanding of language as social practice in a way that challenges expressive-idealist ways of approaching literature, where meanings of words are universally transparent and one-dimensional. Two branches of reading theory which are relevant here are reader-response theory and critical literacy, both of which in their different ways focus attention on the reader as a key agent of meaning-making.

Reader-response theory, originally developed in post-war Germany, aims to demonstrate the fallacy of attempting to determine an author's intention by means of some sort of 'objective' analysis. One of its early proponents, Wolfgang Iser (1974; 1978), suggests that the process of reading is a dynamic and complex movement , where the reader is engaged in making implicit connections, drawing inferences, filling in the 'linguistic gaps' and indeterminacies in a literary text. In Iser's theory the reader builds up various strategies for making sense of complex texts, and learns a repertoire of literary conventions and techniques which s/he can apply to new texts:

> The reader uses the various perspectives offered him by the text in order to relate the patterns and the 'schematised views' to one another, he sets the work in motion and this very process results ultimately in the awakening of responses within himself (1974, p.275).

Experienced readers know that texts do not always make sense on first reading. We speculate, make guesses, read both backwards and forwards in order to create meaning. Iser's 'implied reader' is an accomplished one, who must be prepared to 'suspend the ideas and attitudes that shape our own personality before we can experience the unfamiliar world of the text' (1978, p.291). One problem with Iser's formulation is that reading is not an ideologically innocent activity – Iser fails to

situate readers in a cultural context. If we accept the notion arising from linguists such as Volosinov (1973) and Bakhtin (1990) that meanings of words are inherently culturally constructed and socially negotiated, then we have to accept that readers shaped by different cultural traditions may interpret the signifying properties of the language of a specific text in different ways. Essentially, what Iser is proposing is an implied individual author communicating with an implied individual reader. He argues that the words of the text stimulate what he calls 'mental images' which are the 'basic features of ideation' (Iser, 1978, p135). The text, therefore, is assimilated into the reader's consciousness where it becomes part of her/his personal experience. Iser's reader, although playing an active part in making meaning, is dominated by the text 'as it stimulates the reader on its own terms' (Rosenblatt, (1994, first published in 1978, p.22). For teachers, therefore, Iser's reception theory is problematic in that it assumes readers from homogeneous cultural backgrounds, moreover readers who are highly accomplished, and familiar with specific generic codes.

More useful in constructing a theory of reading applicable to schools is Louise Rosenblatt's notion of a two-way 'transactional' relationship between the reader and the text. Rosenblatt conceives of a poem (an aesthetic literary text) as 'an event in time' (1994, p.11), activated in the moment of reading; reflecting upon the literary experience becomes a 're-enactment of the text' (p.13). At the same time the reader may experience a heightened awareness as part of the reading experience. Two key features of Rosenblatt's approach which distinguish her from Iser are the attention she pays to the social and cultural contexts of readers and her awareness that reading behaviour is affected by purpose. Developing the latter point, Rosenblatt suggests that readers may adopt two broadly contrasting stances (envisaged as part of a continuum) when approaching the reading of a literary text: an aesthetic stance indicates that the reader's purpose is to experience the 'lived through evocation of the work' (p.20); an efferent stance denotes an intention to read from a more analytical perspective ('efferent' from the Latin verb, 'effere' to carry away). Rosenblatt is careful to avoid a suggestion that the first way of reading

– 'reading for its own sake' (p.24) - is somehow less intellectually rigorous (for example, only involving an emotional or imaginative engagement) while the second is more cognitive. Both efferent and aesthetic stances involve a cognitive process on the part of the reader; most literary texts, she says, may be read in these different ways depending on the intentions of the reader. Although not the clearest aspect of Rosenblatt's thesis, she does give recognition to the reader as located socially and historically in the reading process, drawing on her/his previous reading experiences, personal histories and cultural assumptions triggered by the 'verbal cues' in the text, and the invitations to fill textual gaps (1994, p.88).

Emerging from developments around broader concepts of literacy, critical literacy has offered teachers a radical departure from traditional models of reading and writing, a rejection of a mechanistic acquisition of knowledge and skills and the assumption that all competent readers decode literary texts in the same way (Gee, 2012). Within an avowedly ideological agenda, critical literacy is conceived as a complex set of sociocultural practices situated in an increasingly technological world (Lankshear and Knobel, 2003). Most adherents to critical literacy and the related 'New Literacy Studies' (Street, 2003; Gee, 2012; Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) are interested in exploring relations of power as constructed within discursive practice, where discourse is seen as rooted within specific historical and social contexts. Drawing on Bakhtin's (1990) concept of dialogic language, language is seen not only as a social product but also a part of the processes by which individuals interact, and enact change within their society. Meaning making from texts is thus dynamic and multi-layered, negotiated in the classroom through social interaction.

On the face of it, Rosenblatt's version of reader response theory would not appear to be antithetical to critical literacy, but the two approaches have generally been regarded as incompatible, largely because reader response theory has been linked to the idea of 'personal response' (Dymoke, 2009; 2007). This is a concept closely linked with 'personal growth': a child-centred, progressive construction of English

developed in the 1970s (Dixon, 1975), found by Goodwyn (1992) to be the model most favoured by English teachers at the time of the original National Curriculum, and commonly detected in examination questions throughout the past forty years which invite seemingly 'personal' interpretations of works of literature (see section 2.3 below). This is not an unproblematic concept. Conventional school reading practices tend to encourage recall of 'facts' and reproduction of hegemonic readings over genuinely 'individual' interpretation (Bloome, 1994; Coles, 2009; Dymoke, 2002). Even at A Level, McEvoy (2003) suggests that students' reading of Shakespeare is unavoidably mediated by teachers or study guides and that therefore to call their responses 'personal' is a misnomer. As Yandell (2008) comments:

> It is a concept that, given the nexus of power relationships that shape all encounters between student and canonical texts, has tended to promise more liberality, more openness than it has delivered (p.73).

Indeed, classroom-based research by Mellor, O'Neill and Patterson (1991) suggests that even 'active reading' practices which are designed to emphasise personal response may produce readers who make confident interpretations of literary texts, yet remain unaware of the ways in which meaning has been constructed - to the extent that the students in Mellor et al's study cling to the notion that their own individual reading is the 'right' one.

Classroom approaches to texts which borrow from critical literacy have tended to be found more commonly associated with teaching about media-related texts (Misson and Morgan, 2007) or non-canonical literary texts reflecting 'diverse cultures' (Scafe, 1989). Questions of aesthetics have tended to be regarded as aligned with traditional Eng. Lit. responses, lying outside of the critical literacy remit, yet Marshall (2006, p.16) argues that 'it is the aesthetic dimension of English that differentiates it from cultural studies'. In arguing for a renewed foregrounding of the aesthetic, Dymoke (2007) suggests that this will:

> enable young readers, listeners, writers, producers and performers to actively enjoy their textual encounters in ways which have a long-lasting and enriching impact that is currently lacking in their assessment-driven, extract-based textual work (p.117).

In a recent attempt to reconcile the work of Rosenblatt with critical literacy, Misson and Morgan (2007) argue that 'aesthetic texts are generally more open in their interpretative possibilities than other kinds of text' (p.77). Echoing Eagleton (1983), Misson and Morgan point out that aesthetic texts are 'a powerful carrier of ideology' (2007, p.74) and that taking a critical stance is doubly important with literary texts because ideological positions are more naturalised: 'the reality of characters can serve to hide their textuality – and deny students the chance to understand how their responses have been shaped' (p. 77). They propose three interlinked aspects of how we become 'aesthetically engaged' (p.75): firstly, the way texts are 'textured' and the way they structure experience, beliefs and ideas, for example through form and language. Secondly, the way texts invite us to engage socially and ideologically, forming positioned, personal responses (as Misson and Morgan suggest, teachers tend to critically engage with this aspect of media texts rather than of literary texts). They draw a clear distinction here between this construction of the 'personal' and the traditional liberal humanist assumption that Literature helps us grow morally. Thirdly, Misson and Morgan claim that aesthetic texts help us develop 'our subjective repertoires' (p.78), through negotiating the diverse (and sometimes contradictory) attitudes and values texts offer. These arguments suggest a constructive way forward in thinking about reading canonical texts such as Shakespeare in that they draw attention to Rosenblatt's process of aesthetic response, whilst situating the act of reading more firmly as a critical sociocultural practice.

2.3 The Public Exam System

> *English Studies were subordinated to examinations before anyone could really say that English Studies existed.*
>
> *Chris Baldick (1983, p.72)*

The public examination system plays a key role in the process of reproducing official forms of Culture. Never simply an ideologically neutral way of assessing students, national tests (whether at Key Stage 3, GCSE or A Level) convey a complex web of messages about officially assumed values, curriculum priorities and tacitly understood traditions, and this is particularly true of Shakespeare (Sinfield, 1985) given the disproportionate level of importance study of a set play takes in English exams (for example, accounting for one-third of the papers at KS3, and approximately one-third of the marks in the old 'O' Level Literature exam). The requirements of examination specifications and the precise composition of individual questions are the point at which exams impact upon what goes on in classrooms, sometimes imposing a model of teaching and learning at odds with teachers' own preferences (see, for instance, Barnes and Seed, 1984; Bousted, 2000; Coles, 2003; Kress et al., 2005).

At the time my classroom observations took place, all state school year 9 students in England were subject to externally set tests in the core subjects of English, Maths and Science (SATs). The English SATS consisted of three separate tests in Reading, Writing and Shakespeare. The main form of assessment for sixteen year olds (to mark the end of compulsory schooling) was (and still is) GCSE[27]. A compulsory feature of English GCSE was (and still is) Shakespeare, thus fulfilling the National Curriculum requirement to study two separate Shakespeare plays across Key Stages 3 and 4 .

In this section I attempt to map out a historical overview of the way examiners have constructed or 'reproduced' Shakespeare over the past 60 years, with reference to the major literary critical developments explored in the previous section. Whereas several commentators have previously analysed Shakespeare questions taking a horizontal sample across several examination boards for a specific year (eg.Sinfield,

[27] General Certificate of Secondary Education

1985; Rowe, 1979; Warren, 1985; Leach, 1992), I have chosen to examine a longitudinal sample of exam questions from a single exam board (the University of London) between 1951 and 1991 so that I can begin to map out traditions developing over a period of time. My systematic sample consists of English Literature papers at Ordinary, Advanced and Special Paper Levels ('O', 'A' and 'S' Level) set in the Summer for the years: 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981, 1991. The A Level sample is brought up to date with a separate analysis of Edexcel's 2002 AS English Literature Shakespeare paper reflecting the changes brought about by 'Curriculum 2000' revisions.[28]

2.3.1 Background: O and A Level examinations from 1951

Prior to 1951, within the state maintained sector, two levels of School Certificate (General and Higher) were taken by grammar school educated students. These were replaced by the O and A level system in 1951, designed to accommodate the expansion of the state secondary education sector following the 1944 Education Act, but according to the historical overview of English offered by Burgess and Hardcastle (2000), little real change either in the content of the exams or in the intended constituency came about as a result. Universities controlled the public examination system, and were able to resist calls for reform despite several critical reports by official bodies (eg the Hadow Report in 1926; the Spens Report in 1938; the Norwood Report in 1943), all of which concluded to a greater or lesser degree that exams should play a more limited role in the assessment of secondary students.

O Level (taken by high performing 16 year olds) was eventually subsumed into the more comprehensive GCSE in 1988 (although the London Board continued to set

[28] My ten year sampling system would require me to use the paper for 2001, but Edexcel does not archive past papers for more than 3 years, after which they are destroyed, thus they were unable to provide me with a copy. Old London Board exam papers are lodged in the University of London central library, which ceased to archive exam material once Edexcel came into existence.

English Literature O Level papers until 1991, presumably for private schools and overseas centres) after which Shakespeare was mostly examined by means of coursework. A Level Literature continued unchanged until 2000 when government revisions introduced updated assessment criteria and restructured the course into two separate components: AS (Advanced Subsidiary) and A2 (second level of A Level study). Since the late 1980s Examination Boards for England and Wales have been gradually reorganised, amalgamated and semi-privatised. The London Board provides an interesting example of this process.[29]

2.3.2 Structure and format of the O Level Literature exam

Between 1951 and 1981 written answers on Shakespeare accounted for about one third of the total Literature O Level marks. Students were required to answer at least two questions on their set play, the first taking the form of a context question, where a short extract is reprinted followed by four or five questions requiring brief, 'factual', answers. By 1991 the format of the context had been revised, but for at least 30 years the look, format, content and apparent purpose of the questions remain similar. For example, the context set in 1961 on *Twelfth Night* offers the candidate a choice of two passages, both consisting of approximately 10 lines, and accompanied by questions almost identical in style. Question a) tests straightforward factual recall: 'Who is the young gentleman? Why does he desire to speak with Olivia?'. Question b) selects three lines for translation: 'Give in your own words the meaning of:…'. The next question develops this translation skill a little further by asking the candidate to 'explain the meaning' of two phrases 'in the passage', presumably requiring the student to consider the way the context might affect the meaning. Question d) asks for more plot recall: 'Say briefly what has taken place immediately before this passage…' and question e) asks the candidate to 'refer briefly' to a similar episode elsewhere in the play 'where another character

[29] See Yarker (2005) for an account of the role and growth of 'edu-businesses' such as Pearson/Edexcel (the current incarnation of the London Examination Board).

says very much the same thing about Malvolio'. Examiners' Reports (University of London, 1951-1971) make it clear that accurate translations (into 'correct' Standard English) and literal explanations of metaphorical language are to be rewarded most highly in answer to the context question.

In each O Level paper candidates are then offered a choice of essay questions on their set play. The nature of the essay questions remains similar throughout this 40 year period.

2.3.3 Structure and format of the A Level exam (1951-1991)

During these years, A Level Literature consisted of three separate exam papers, with Shakespeare figuring as a key component of Paper 1. Despite periodic revisions to the overall structure of the A Level papers, the requirements for Shakespeare study remain fairly constant: essentially candidates were expected to study and answer questions on two set Shakespeare plays: one would require an response in essay format, and one took the form of a closed context question. The latter consisted of an extract of between 10-20 lines, followed by three short questions. In 1951, for example, one of these is plot-based, while the remaining two focus very much on the ability to translate archaic language into 'good modern English'. The following Examiners' comment (University of London, 1951) is suggestive of the type of *Scrutiny*-influenced teaching this question is meant to encourage:

> few candidates seem not to have had any systematic training in the valuable discipline of looking closely at a passage of Shakespearean English, firmly resolving to give every word its value (p. 32).

By 1991 the context format has undergone some change with the introduction of 'open text' exams and now appears as an essay question which directs candidates to certain passages in their own copies of the texts.

2.3.4 A typology of examination essay questions: Taking the sample exam papers from 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991 I coded individual essay questions on each exam paper according to question topic. Initially I set out with 6 prototype categories, the first four emerging from the key critical traditions discussed earlier: character, theme, plot, language, staging, other. Some essay questions cross over more than one category, and these are recorded as fractions (.5) under the relevant headings. For example, in 1971 one of the O Level questions on *Richard II* falls into two distinct parts. The first asks students to 'Give a clear account of how Richard handles the dispute between Bolingbroke and Mowbray…', while the second part of the question asks 'what aspects of his character are revealed in these episodes?'. As Table 2a shows, in the end all of the O Level questions fitted into just three categories: character, theme and plot (with the possible exception of one of the 1951 questions, which I coded 'other').

Table 2a: Shakespeare essay questions by type (O Level)

	Total number of Shakespeare questions	Character	theme	plot	language	staging	other
O level							
1951	6	4.5		.5			1
1961	6	3.5		2.5			
1971	6	4.5		1.5			
1981	4	2.5	1	.5			
1991	4	3.5	.5				

Note that the table above excludes analysis of context questions.

Thus, between 1951 and 1971, O Level Literature students simply needed to be well-versed in the art of recounting the plot of their set play, be familiar enough with the whole text to be able to translate several lines chosen at random as part of the lottery of the context question, and to write about 'character'. Interestingly, the concept of a thematic approach appears in my sample only from 1981.

(Thematic analysis is now a common feature of school Shakespeare study, as evidenced by KS3 test requirements, discussed later.)

At A Level, the range and scope of essay questions is outlined in Table 2b below:

Table 2b – Shakespeare essay questions by type (A Level)

	Total no of Shakespeare questions	character	theme	plot	language	staging	other
A level							
1951	6	1.5	1.5	2			1
1961	4	.5	1.5	1	1		
1971	6	3.5	2		.5		
1981	3	1.5	1.5				
1991	4	2			2		
2002 (AS)	10	2	4				4

Note that the table above excludes analysis of context questions.

Character remains a constant focus, often posed at A level in terms of comparisons or relationships, as in a question on *Othello* in 1981: 'With close reference to the text, analyse the development of the relationship between Othello and Desdemona'. After 1961 recounting or commenting on the plot no longer appears as a significant component of a question at this level. Instead, questions about language become more frequent. What is surprising again is the absence of any invitation to consider the plays as theatre. Occasionally there are questions which appear to make reference to the stage but, as this example from 1971 shows, these really amount to thinly veiled invitations to talk about character: 'What special difficulties would you expect to encounter, either as actor, or as producer, in interpreting the part of Hamlet, and how would you try to overcome them?'

In ‘S’ Level papers (originally termed ‘Scholarship’ level, renamed ‘Special Paper’ by 1971) taken by a small percentage of A Level students intending to read English at University, candidates are expected to write about texts other than those prescribed for A Level papers that year, therefore the questions are necessarily generic in nature. This leads examiners to focus on Shakespeare’s supposed grand themes, such as ‘ambition’ or ‘moral purpose’ or to make reference to the plays’ apparent ‘timelessness’. Questions about the nature of comedy or tragedy crop up more than once. Despite Shakespeare not being compulsory at S level, Examiners’ Reports repeatedly comment that Shakespeare is one of the most frequently attempted questions (eg. University of London, 1961).

2.3.5 Analysis of essay questions

The dominant category across all these exam papers is a notion of ‘character’ which conforms to the Bradleyan norm. Students are asked to consider ‘characters’ as if living, breathing people who have lives which extend beyond the immediate context of the play. Examiners want to know about a character’s ‘state of mind’ (eg. A Level, 1971), or how far a character ‘brought his misfortunes upon himself’ (O Level, 1961). Characters can ‘make decisions’ and have ‘reasons’ for particular actions (O Level, 1971). An underlying system of individual morality is reflected in the wording of many questions, value judgements which each candidate is expected to share: ‘What qualities in Viola make her the most attractive character in *Twelfth Night*? You should compare her with at least one other character’ (O Level, 1991). On other occasions questions seek to find out if a reader ‘sympathises’ with a character, as for example in the deceptively simple, ‘How far do you find Prince Hal a sympathetic figure in *Henry IV, Part 2*?’ (A Level, 1971), where precise notions of ‘sympathy’ are never explored or defined, presumably on the assumption that ‘we’ all share the same beliefs about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ characteristics regardless of context or circumstances. Divining ‘universal’ truths from Shakespearean heroes denies the significance of historical context. Indeed, in

1961, Examiners explicitly praise candidates' 'first-class work' on *King Lear* which explored the play's 'psychological and moral problems…with interest and understanding. Sensitive responses…to the play's universal significance were pleasingly frequent' (University of London, 1961, p. 10)

As part of the *Scrutiny* project, Leavis' overt (and dishonest) rejection of explicit theorising (1952) served to 'naturalise' the critical process, to render it invisible, a pernicious sleight of hand which made individual readings look like straightforward common sense. This is reflected in the trend whereby examiners preface essay questions with an unattributed comment in quotation marks. So, for example, in 1971, A Level candidates are invited to comment on the statement: "The soliloquys in *Hamlet* do not, as soliloquys sometimes can, hold up the action of the play. In that they are in the fullest sense dramatic, they are part of the action". The assumption implicit in this statement is decontextualised and dislocated from history or ideology. The candidate has no idea, for example, whether the comment has been made as part of a more extended consideration of the play as a literary entity or as a piece of theatre. Such comments are posed in such a way as to tacitly invite agreement from their student readers.

Until the 'Curriculum 2000' changes were introduced at A Level, students were not expected to study critical readings *per se*. Indeed, the London Board Examiners take presumptuous candidates to task for showing 'too much attention to the critics' (University of London, 1961, p. 10). In 1985, Ken Warren, writing as a Chief Examiner for one of the other exam boards, explained what examiners were looking for (Warren, 1985). Advising able students to engage in background reading in order to develop their thoughts, he warns them, however, not to make explicit reference in essays. Critical material by Bradley, Tillyard, Quiller-Couch or Wilson Knight are his sole recommendations, a deeply conservative list considering he was writing in the same year that *Political Shakespeare* was published (1985), a year after Dollimore's *Radical Tragedy* (1984) and three years after Longhurst (1982)

took the exam system to task for reproducing deeply conservative readings of Shakespeare.

Knights' and Leavis' legacy is immediately discernable in the number of questions which prompt students to make 'close reference to the text' in their answers. Several questions explicitly focus on close textual analysis and thematic aspects of the plays. This approach puts the written text under a literary microscope, and serves to emphasise reading as a solitary activity, rather than as part of a social dialogue. As such, it is ideal for the silent and solitary conditions of the exam hall. The micro-critical scrutiny of a textual extract represents the logical conclusion of this method – developed throughout the period of O and A Level examinations in the format of the context question (ironically named, given that it treats the playtext as a free-standing, decontextualised piece of art). Recurrent imagery and linguistic patterns are sought out in a way which attempts to create an artificial coherence and internal order within the text. Plays are considered primarily as dramatic poems, as for example, in a question on *Antony and Cleopatra* from the 1991 A Level paper: 'Turn to Act 2, 2, l.194 - end of scene. Examine how Shakespeare obtains his effects here poetically and dramatically and consider the importance of this section at this stage of the play.' And here, an example from the 1981 S Level paper: '"Shakespearian comedy is essentially verbal." Do you agree?', a question which clearly expects a close exploration of linguistic humour as a substantial part of the answer, despite its apparently open invitation to take issue with its basic premise. In 1991 S Level candidates are also nudged towards an acceptance of practical criticism as the prime approach in the question: 'Do you accept the view that Shakespeare may be a great dramatist, but he is an even greater poet?'. It would take a brave sixth form student indeed who could set out to dismantle this claim in the space of a one hour exam essay, and risk jeopardising a University place in the process.

Much thematic-based analysis tends to impose arbitrary abstractions on to the plays, unrelated to any historical understanding. In the 1971 A Level paper, candidates were asked, 'What does Laertes contribute to the development of the theme of revenge in *Hamlet*?' Revenge is to be considered within the closed world of the play, not as an Elizabethan/Jacobean theatrical genre which relates to the social world of contemporary producers and playgoers. Interestingly, in this type of question Bradleyan notions of character are tidily subsumed into thematic considerations.

The concept of 'audience' is artificially homogenised, whether taken to mean spectators in the theatre or, more often as not, a kind of euphemism for 'reader'. This concept of audience appears in questions such as, 'To what extent is the audience encouraged to feel both sympathy for Shylock and antagonism towards him?' (O Level, 1981). 'Audience' becomes a romanticised, abstract notion, uncontaminated by ideological influences and differences, undifferentiated by history. As in both the questions above, the frame of reference points away from consideration of a theatrical experience and limits the student to 'the world of the text', a world which has developed out of academic, textual study rather than performance.

Linked to the homogenised concept of audience is the equally romanticised notion of 'personal response'. Exam boards have traditionally sought to reward candidates who make 'informed judgements' and 'intelligent and sensitive' responses to their set plays (Leach, 1992, p.37). At best this amounts to subjectivity based on close textual study. Despite the assurances of chief examiners that there is no such thing as 'the right answer' (eg. Warren, 1985), it is difficult to see which questions in my 1951-1991 sample invite readings which have not emerged out of an amalgam of Bradley and Leavis. In reality, dominant interpretations are likely to have been naturalised, mediated through a process of study aids, exam questions and teachers' own formation as readers of Shakespeare (see Leach, 1992), an unbroken

cycle of cultural reproduction. In my sample of Examiners' Reports it is only in 1991 that candidates are explicitly invited to 'follow any line of argument' in their Shakespeare essays (University of London, 1991, p. 6). Otherwise, instructions are more rule-bound: in exam rubric, candidates are generally reminded to make 'close reference to the text'; O Level candidates are reminded that 'credit will be given for good English and the orderly presentation of material'. A recurring theme of Examiners' Reports from 1951 onwards is criticism of candidates' lack of technical accuracy and knowledge of facts. The emphasis is on 'correctness', on working within the rules, whether stated explicitly or not.

2.3.6 Curriculum 2000: bringing A Level up to date

In 2002 students following Edexcel's AS English Literature syllabus were required to study a set Shakespeare play either for a one hour exam or as coursework. Shakespeare study contributed approximately 30% of the total award (also at A2, where study of a second Shakespeare text was part of a comparative exam question in the final module). Significantly, the AS examination paper is entitled, 'Shakespeare in Context', echoing one of the five new Assessment Objectives established by the QCA in 2000 as common to each exam board's specification. In this assessment objective, students are expected to 'show understanding of the contexts in which literary texts are written and understood', suggestive at the very least of a belief that Shakespeare's plays are best understood as theatrical pieces placed in their historical (and political) context, viewed alongside related literary and non-literary material. 'Shakespeare in Context' at once signals to me as an experienced former A Level teacher that this represents a clear break with the past.

In the Summer 2002 exam paper (Unit 3b) two alternative questions are provided for each of the five set plays. At a surface level, Curriculum 2000 has moved advanced level study of Shakespeare forward, although four out of the ten questions focus on themes and two are questions about 'character'. The second question on *Antony and Cleopatra* provides an interesting example of how this

tension works: ' "Shakespeare presents Cleopatra as a highly intelligent woman, aware that if she is to function and survive in a world of masculine power, she has to play a variety of roles, all consciously feminine."' This apparently invites a feminist analysis of the play, one which might consider various key (male) readings which have shaped the received interpretation of Cleopatra for most of the twentieth century. However, the question goes on to ask candidates to 'explore Shakespeare's presentation of Cleopatra in the light of this comment… include detailed reference to at least two sequences from the play.' The question appears to be leading students back towards close textual analysis. In fact every question on the paper requires 'a close examination' or its equivalent of a particular scene or section(s) of the text. In this way, students are in effect confined in an hour's examination essay to the closed world of the play, where intimate knowledge of the text is to be rewarded in preference to an understanding of the contexts in which the play was produced and how it has been reproduced over the centuries.

The myth of authorial intention has played a powerful role in the examining of Shakespeare over the past half century. In the questions taken from my 1951-1991 sample of exam papers, candidates were frequently asked to comment on a statement such as, '"Shakespeare certainly shows us the efficiency and shrewdness of Bolingbroke as a politician, but he also shows us his hypocrisy and ruthlessness" (O Level, 1971). The ghost of Shakespeare hovers uneasily over this 2002 exam paper too. Phrases such as 'explore Shakespeare's presentation of..'; 'Shakespeare presents the character of a king…'; 'Shakespeare explores…' occur no less than twelve times in the space of ten questions. The word 'presentation' is ill-defined, presumably favoured by the examiners because it fudges the text/theatre distinction. No question hints at the theatrical possibilities of the play. Shakespeare 'in context' clearly excludes four centuries of dramatic context. Concepts such as character, personal life or themes sit uneasily with the conventions of seventeenth century theatre (Longhurst, 1982). Indeed, it is ironic that an art form which is so well suited to represent public action and the dramatic exchange of ideas should become a vehicle for studying character (Sparks, 1988).

Nearly twenty years after Alan Sinfield's influential essay on exam Shakespeare (1985), it is apparent that the critical framework of exam questions has only shifted slightly, despite major curriculum review in 2000.

Ultimately Shakespeare's enduring place in education as constructed by the exam system is about authority and tradition. School Shakespeare has been largely stripped of its ideological content, sanitised and domesticated, neatly packaged for exam purposes. This process, I would argue, is epitomised by the Conservative Government's imposition of national Key Stage 3 Shakespeare SATs tests in 1993 and successive New Labour governments' pursuit of this testing regime up to present day. This forms the focus of the following section.

2.3.7 Key Stage 3 SATS 1993-2008 [30]

> *"I am afraid that the interests of children are not being served either by some of the examination boards. One recently defended the use of a hamburger advertisement in a public exam by claiming that it provided just as much 'food for thought' for children as our great literary heritage…They'd give us Chaucer with chips. Milton with mayonnaise. Mr Chairman, I want Shakespeare in our classrooms, not Ronald McDonald."*
>
> (John Patten, speech to Conservative Party Conference , Autumn 1992)

As I argued in Chapter 1, politicians' obsession with Shakespeare is not new, but the fervour with which John Major's government appealed to a collective sense of nostalgia for a mythic golden age of education was unprecedented. The imposition of an externally set national Shakespeare test for all the nation's 14 year olds marked a clear hardening of a particular ideological position by the then Conservative Government.

[30] Part of this section appears in Coles, J. (2003) 'Alas, poor Shakespeare: teaching and testing at Key Stage 3', *English in Education,* 37(3), pp. 3-12.

In April 1993 the Government's revised National Curriculum Order for English explicitly stipulated that 'pupils should read a minimum of two plays by Shakespeare...' (DfE, 1993, p. 42), one play to be studied at KS3, one at KS4. From now on until 2008 all fourteen year olds in England (and in pre-devolution Wales) were to be externally tested on Reading, Writing and Shakespeare. In the original incarnation all papers were to be tiered on three levels – meaning that Shakespeare was to be used as a crude ideological tool to separate out the cultural sheep from the goats: only those pupils entered for the highest two tiers would study a Shakespeare play. Students judged to be performing at National Curriculum levels 3-5 would be limited to studying decontextualised fragments included in a pre-released exam anthology. The lowest attaining pupils – operating at below a level 3 – were not to be assessed on Shakespeare at all.

The set-play Shakespeare questions in these original SATs follow what I might term the 'Trivial Pursuit' model – short, closed questions which reduce Shakespeare to the level of a quiz. The style of questioning was perfectly satirised by a contemporary cartoon in the *Times Educational Supplement* which portrayed a fretful pupil poring over an exam desk confronted by a manic robot demanding, "Why did Romeo fall in love with Juliet? GIVE THREE REASONS!" (cited in Coles, 1993, p. 13). Some questions are reminiscent of old 'O' Level contexts from the 1950s and 1960s, in that pupils are asked to translate approximately 4 lines of printed text into modern Standard English. Reductive as these Shakespeare questions are, nothing stimulated the rebellion of English teachers more than the government's forty-six page pre-released Anthology of literature (SEAC/DfE, 1993a). For the Summer 1993 test paper the contents of this literary rag-bag were neatly sandwiched between an extract from *As You Like It* (Jaques' Seven Ages of Man speech) and Sonnet No. 73 (SEAC/DfE, 1993a, p. 3 & p. 45). Shakespeare, in effect, becomes the arch (and over-arching) example of what the SEAC editors term, 'writers who have made major contributions to this country's literary

tradition' (SEAC/DfE, 1993b, p.2). For pupils deemed to be working at levels 3-5, the scraps of text in this Anthology would include the sole 'access' they were allowed to Shakespeare. Quite apart from the questionable notion that it is easier to study extracts than to read a whole play, the *As You Like It* speech demonstrates significant lessons about the perils of decontextualising chunks of Shakespeare. Away from its context, the speech is popularly taken at face value to emphasise the predictability of human existence, life viewed as a simple journey, stripped bare of cultural or historical significance. This is the sense in which the speech is used in the Anthology, as an introductory text establishing one of the two main themes: 'the journey through life' (SEAC/DfE, 1993b, p.2). Yet in the world of the play things are far from predictable: the words are spoken by a malcontent figure, a man who is known to revel in declaring his cynical, pessimistic view of life. Moreover, it's a speech uttered in a play in which a woman, originally played by a boy, takes on the identity of a man pretending to be a woman. Clearly, nothing should be taken at face value. Without narrative or dramatic pegs upon which to hang anthologised speeches and other literary extracts, pupils become totally reliant on their teachers to explain the decontextualised words for them, an exercise in anachronistic pointlessness.

Despite the Government's subsequent abandonment of a Key Stage 3 Literature Anthology (in the face of an onslaught of professional condemnation and co-ordinated union action), criticisms of testing Shakespeare at Key Stage 3 continued throughout the next decade, including various statements issued by NATE.[31] NATE undertook periodic joint evaluations of the SATs with researchers from one of the main teachers' unions, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL). In each case, similar conclusions were reached, throwing serious doubt upon the validity and the reliability of the tests as a whole, and specifically calling for the testing of Shakespeare to be dropped in favour of Teacher Assessment (for example, see ATL

[31] See various issues of *NATE News*, eg.: Summer 1993; Summer 1995; Summer 1997; September 2004.

et al., 1998). That it took until 2008 before any Secretary of State for Education pulled the plug on the widely derided tests indicates that ideological concerns overrode educational ones for fifteen years.

However, by 1998 Shakespeare test questions had evolved into essay format and the SATs had became an established part of schools' annual exam procedures. At this time six assessment objectives are listed for the assessment of reading a Shakespeare play (QCA, 1998a, p. 1):

- Shakespeare's presentation of ideas;
- the motivation and behaviour of characters;
- the development of plot;
- the language of the scenes;
- the overall impact of the scenes;
- the presentation of the scenes on stage.

The range of questions themselves range from traditional 'Lit. Crit.' essays to empathetic and imaginative responses, for example:

> What do you learn about the Nurse and how does her character add to the humour in these scenes? [*Romeo & Juliet*, Act 2, scs. 4-5]
>
> Explain how you want the fairies to play their parts and what you want to suggest to the audience about the fairy world. [*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 2, sc. 1]
>
> Imagine you are Helena. Write down your thoughts and the confusion you feel as you run away. [*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 3, sc. 2]

It is worth looking at the two questions on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in more detail. On the face of it they appear to invite pupils to engage imaginatively with the play, to treat the text as a script and to actively (re-)construct their own versions. Their written answers, however, completed in conditions inimical to such open-ended tasks, need to conform to the published 'Performance Criteria' which are used as mark band descriptors (QCA, 1998a, p. 51). Pupils' responses must be 'closely linked with the text', show 'understanding of the use of language and its contribution to the effects of the scene on the audience' and illustrate their

answers with 'the use of carefully selected references to the text' if they are to achieve the top two levels (*ibid.*). Given the time-constraints of the test (1 hour) and the restrictions of the approved written format, pupils and their teachers are in effect being nudged towards a formulaic approach to exam preparation, at the core of which lies the provision of notes on character, examples of linguistic features, and practice in the use of quotation. This latter point is supported by the QCA's official review of the 1998 tests (QCA, 1998b) which comments positively on pupils' engaged responses to the empathetic tasks, but reminds teachers that 'to score the higher marks however, the pupils' writing must be *closely linked to the text…*' (QCA, 1998b, p. 17), a coded warning that close reading and the art of selecting quotations are required.

By 2003 questions which invite empathetic responses have been removed, and essay questions are wholly of the traditional 'lit crit' variety. Somewhat controversially, the Shakespeare format was revised in 2003 to include a new part A to the Shakespeare test (for a more detailed account, see Coles, 2003). The ensuing outcry resulted in the new format being dropped by 2005, although the substantive essay questions and mark schemes remained largely the same. Thus, the Year 9 students I observed (as detailed in Chapter 4) were being examined under this regime. It is therefore worth exploring the requirements in some detail.

According to official Qualifications and Curriculum Authority guidelines (QCA, 2002b), each essay question or task should cover one of the following four areas:

- character;
- ideas, themes and issues;
- the language of the text;
- the text in performance.

In May 2003 the question on *Henry V* was designed to address 'ideas, themes and issues'; *Macbeth*, 'character and motivation'; *Twelfth Night*, 'language' (QCA,

2003, p.42). No question required consideration of the text 'in performance' this year – tough luck on pupils who had worked on their set play in this way. However, the official QCA sample test questions and mark schemes published in Autumn 2002 as guidance for teachers make clear what examiners appear to mean by 'performance'.

On the face of it the 'areas' of study covered by the questions themselves appear unremarkable in the historical context of exam conventions. The reality as revealed by the mark schemes, however, exposes the narrowness of the learning experience for pupils in what may well be their first formal encounter with a Shakespeare play. Whatever the question posed, basically the same type of written answer is required and the mark schemes only vary in emphasis. So, for example, the sample (performance-based) task on *Macbeth*:

> Imagine you are going to direct these extracts for a class performance [Act 1, sc.7, line 28-end; Act 5 sc.3]. Explain how the actor playing Macbeth should show his reactions, and give reasons for your suggestions

Examiners make it clear that although the question 'focuses on the play in performance… pupils will need to refer to characters and language to answer the question' (QCA, 2002a, p.30). The top mark band rewards pupils who write an essay outlining an 'interpretation of the role of Macbeth'. Teachers are further advised that the examiners are expecting pupils to comment in detail on Macbeth's use of language. In the real SATs questions set in June 2003, the question on *Macbeth* ('What impressions might an audience get of Lady Macbeth from the different ways she speaks and behaves in these extracts?') requires a pupil to describe the different things Lady Macbeth says and comment on the ways she behaves and to demonstrate 'clear understanding of Lady Macbeth's use of language, eg in the first extract *she uses aggressive questions to control Macbeth…*' (QCA, 2003, p.74). In order to achieve middle band marks or higher, candidates must pepper their essay with 'relevant references to the text' (*ibid.*). The assessed examples of work provided by the examiners to illustrate the mark scheme include

an answer which was awarded marks from the top band (p.80). The piece reads like an identikit Key Stage 3 essay, with its adherence to the Point-Example-Explanation (PEE) mantra[32]. For a top-performing pupil the style is mechanical and jerky; the essay consists of 6 'PEEs', each formulating a separate short paragraph of around 5 lines in length, as demonstrated by the two following examples:

> …Firstly she seems very bossy and domineering because of the way she chastises and orders Macbeth about. – 'Why have you left the chamber?' She speaks in abrupt sentences as shown above…[paragraph 1]
>
> Lady Macbeth is cruel and heartless in this scene. This is conveyed to the audience when she says 'I would while it was smiling in my face/…the brains out'. She doesn't sound feminine or sensitive at all. [paragraph 4]

The question on *Henry V* is meant to test pupils' knowledge of themes and issues in the play: 'In these extracts [Act 1, 2, 234-297; Act 4, 3, 88-125], how is the idea of strong leadership explored through the character of Henry?' The first pupil's sample answer (slightly shorter than others at approximately 110 words) makes comments such as: 'He gives long but encouraging speeches that get men hyped up for battle' (QCA, 2003, p.55), but the examiners' marginal annotations criticise this for consisting of 'simple comments not clearly rooted in text'. The essay only attracts a total of 2 marks (out of 18). To achieve the highest two mark bands (ie between 13 and 18 marks) the mark scheme demands 'Clear focus on how the idea of strong leadership is explored through the character of Henry in these extracts…'; 'Appreciation of the effects of language in presenting strong leadership…'; 'Well-chosen references to the text…' (QCA, 2003, p. 54). Regardless of the question type, the exemplar test answers convey clear messages to English teachers, that in order to prepare their fourteen year old pupils properly, what is essentially required is a line-by-line analysis of the two prescribed chunks of text, where character and language in particular are privileged far above 'issues' and

[32] PEE or 'point, example, explanation' is a common formulaic approach to essay writing emerging out of the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy. See Chapter 5 for discussions of students' written essays.

'performance'. Pupils who, in the published sample answers, fail to pepper their answer with quotations consistently fail to gain more than the lowest band of marks. Only one answer out of the total of twelve examples across the three plays is praised for showing 'insight'; none are highlighted for showing any sense of 'engagement' with either the play or the task. The rigid mark schemes are the point at which the imperative to 'teach to the test' becomes explicit. Examiners' advice in the QCA's evaluation of the 2002 tests (QCA, 2002b, pp.21-3) is naggingly insistent, regardless of the precise play or of the exact focus of the question: 'read the text in more detail…select direct quotation and more precise references'; 'extend interpretation of character and motive'. This is the advice which teachers would have used to help them prepare their pupils for the 2003 tests and beyond. The model of teaching this tacitly suggests is reminiscent of the old O level context questions, requiring a line-by-line slog through the play. But in some ways this is worse, in that it is concentrated on two extracts from each play and therefore demands that these bits of text be put under a literary microscope, not even necessitating knowledge of the whole play.

The question on *Henry V* raises further issues. As it is posed on the test paper (see above) the notion of 'strong leadership' is foregrounded and linked with Henry as an individual; power is to be seen as manifested through 'character', rather than through a web of allegiances, political and historical forces. Unsurprisingly, all four pupil responses provided as examples by the examiners make uncritical comments about Henry's character and leadership qualities – hardly answers which indicate much exploration of 'issues' in a play as political as *Henry V.* That Henry's actions in taking England to war against the French can be open to very different interpretations has been at the heart of discussions about the play since World War Two.[33] Pupils who have, say, seen Olivier's overtly patriotic interpretation of the

[33] Olivier's 1944 film, a deliberate piece of patriotic propaganda, opens with a dedication to the commandos who led the D-Day landings; Henry is portrayed as a quintessential English hero. In contrast, Michael Bogdanov's 1985-6 production for the English Shakespeare Company presented Henry's war as a 'war of expediency, ruthless manipulation, bribery and corruption' and drew conscious parallels with Margaret Thatcher's Falklands War (Bell et al, 1993).

role of Henry on film may draw different conclusions from those who watched more recent productions. Whether you read or see the play at a time of war, or, indeed, what your attitude to that war is, will very likely colour your response to the play and to Henry himself. This is particularly relevant for young people sitting their SAT in 2003, when two months earlier thousands of British school students had taken part in mass demonstrations against war in Iraq. Indeed, Nicholas Hytner's 2003 production of the play at the National Theatre made direct parallels with Tony Blair's controversial decision to take Britain to war; in this production, Henry was portrayed as a self-serving and ruthlessly manipulative leader whose justification for declaring war was seen to be politically and morally dubious.

The way the questions are framed and, crucially, the narrow scope imposed by the assessment criteria and the requirement to concentrate on a fragment of text, shape Shakespeare in fairly traditional ways. Little in the 2003 mark-scheme would encourage teachers to venture beyond safe parameters: close textual study of the selected scenes and basic comments on character form the core of any high-scoring answer. It would be hardly surprising that the process of making assessment criteria more transparent over the past fifteen years has ultimately operated as a straitjacket, as Carol Atherton (2005) has pointed out even in respect of GCSE Shakespeare coursework:

> The various Teachers' Handbooks and Examiners' Reports published by the exam boards have effectively acted to establish certain norms that come to assume the status of orthodoxy, recommending certain types of task and encouraging teachers to modify their work accordingly (p.6).

These 'orthodoxies', what Bourdieu calls the 'indices' of the way educational knowledge is institutionalised (Bourdieu, 1976b), are important factors to be born in mind in Chapter 4 when considering the approaches to *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Henry V* adopted by four different teachers with their year 9 and 10 classes.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Background: the 'autobiography of the question' [34]

> *Researchers should acknowledge and disclose their own selves in the research*
>
> *(Cohen et al., 2000, p.225)*

As previous chapters have begun to indicate, my *a priori* research questions evolved organically, partly out of my career over a fifteen year period as an English teacher in multi-ethnic London schools, and partly as a result of my formal involvement with Rex Gibson's national Shakespeare in Schools Project:

- how do English teachers construct the entity 'Shakespeare' in the secondary school classroom?
- in what ways do students in urban classrooms site themselves in the process of reading a set Shakespeare text?
- is 'active Shakespeare' a panacea for pupil disaffection in the context of test-driven curricula?

These initial questions must be understood in the historical and ideological context of a National Curriculum where compulsorily assessed Shakespeare exists as a matter of government policy, and where 'Shakespeare' itself is a loaded cultural term, open to a wide range of interpretation. For me, my teaching life, my research interests and my ideological commitment to social justice within education are inseparable. Since the researcher as 'a human instrument' necessarily brings a set

[34] Miller (1995) argues that 'the autobiography of the question' not only presents a way of 'historicizing the questions [researchers] are addressing', but also offers a 'sense of working consciously within and against accepted [academic] forms' (p.26).

of ‘interpretations and cultural orientations’ to the research (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005, p.16), it then follows that a brief account of how I came to undertake this study must play a significant part in explaining my ontological and epistemological assumptions.

My school teaching career spans the 1980s and 1990s, a particularly turbulent period for English teachers, one which connects the so-called ‘culture wars’ of the early 1980s with the formation of the then Conservative government’s National Curriculum (which enshrined the study of Shakespeare by an act of parliament) and its subsequent increasingly contested rewrites; this period includes the imposition (and initial boycott) of national tests (SATs) in the early 1990s. Throughout this time I took part in curriculum-centred campaigns through my professional English teachers’ subject association (NATE) and was an active trade union member in the National Union of Teachers, particularly involved in the anti-SATs protests. In many ways it was a tremendously exciting time to be an English teacher. I remember it as a time of contradictory movements – whilst right-wing cultural commentators with the ear of the government embarked on a reactionary quest for a mythic ‘golden age’ of national unity, promoting the view that Shakespeare represented all that is best in the English Literary heritage (for example, Pascall, 1992, Marenbon, 1987), at the opposite end of the spectrum, materialist critics influenced by Marx and Marxist commentators such as Gramsci and Williams, suggested that Shakespeare’s iconic reputation had been culturally constructed (for example, Dollimore and Sinfield, 1985, Taylor, 1989).

During the late 1980s I was seconded to the national Shakespeare and Schools Project based at the Cambridge Institute of Education. Ironically, the invitation to apply for a secondment arose out of a row I managed inadvertently to trigger at a residential course to which I had been deputed by my school’s English department. It forms an excellent illustration of what Hawkes terms Shakespeare’s extraordinarily energetic ‘afterlife’, employed here as a ‘cultural weapon’ (Hawkes,

2003, p.576). The weekend residential course had been designed to introduce practising English teachers to the new 'active methods' of teaching Shakespeare being promoted by Rex Gibson at the Cambridge Institute of Education. Much of the weekend consisted of practical workshops, but time was also put aside for discussion and reflection. Teacher participants were keen to discuss the usefulness of drama-based approaches as a way of providing 'access' to the plays and as a way of breaking down pupils' fears. What was never discussed was the reason why teachers chose to include Shakespeare in their GCSE courses when, in those pre-National Curriculum days it was non-compulsory. The storm of outrage I provoked by posing that question took me completely by surprise. Querying Shakespeare's divine right to a place in the curriculum was simply not to be countenanced. Instead, my own professional and intellectual credentials were cast in doubt. One participant, for instance, publicly demanded to know whether I had an English degree. Once the shouting had subsided, the wryly amused workshop leader took me to one side, pressing into my hand an application form for a secondment.

My unexpected reward, a term with the Shakespeare in Schools Project, was hugely enjoyable. Part of the deal was a residential week in Stratford, watching a different play each night, engaging in academic seminar discussions (led by Stanley Wells amongst others) and participating in workshops facilitated by the infectiously enthusiastic Rex Gibson. For the rest of the term, I was based in the London Borough where I was employed, mainly working with local sixth forms, designing and leading drama workshops based around plays set for A level examination. On the one hand this enabled me to develop a wide repertoire of active teaching approaches, whilst on the other it afforded me a fairly clear overview of the state of A level teaching across the local authority, a persistently stodgy diet of reading round the class, closed questions and dictated notes, where the teacher's reading of a play was taken to be the 'correct' one. I also had the chance to collaborate with a team of advisers and teachers working in primary schools. Despite the obvious attractions of a term spent in this way, I continued to wrestle with central questions of culture, pedagogy and ideology: for example, what place should

Shakespeare have in the curriculum? What is the relationship between literary criticism and classroom study? Afterwards, reading the subsequent Project reports (to which I contributed) led me to begin to question whether the Gibson-promoted active, drama-based methodology was in reality masking some straightforwardly traditional models of reading and theories of literature.

My nagging dissatisfaction with 'active methods' as a cure-all for all the problems associated with compulsory National Curriculum Shakespeare fed into further reading and research carried out as part of my MA dissertation completed in 1991. I was particularly keen to interrogate the prevailing liberal-left 'cultural entitlement' argument and carried out research in my own year 10 classroom into ways in which students from diverse social and ethnic backgrounds made sense of *Macbeth.* I presented transcript data in which students were beginning to deconstruct the Shakespeare myth and move towards an understanding of the way in which their own histories were shaping their relationship with Shakespeare.[35]

Meanwhile, alarmist rows about English as a school subject continued apace in the press, a delayed and modified version of academia's 'culture wars' a few years earlier. The hysterical response to 'The Future of English' conference at Ruskin College, Oxford in 1991 (organised by Raphael Samuel under the aegis of *History Workshop*) will serve to provide an example of the way in which forces of reaction were marshalled to suppress any perceived attack on the established literary canon. A range of speakers including English academics, writers, teachers and teacher educators contributed to debates about English as a subject. Rightwing journalists seeking evidence that dangerous Marxists had gained control of state schools needed to look no further than the programme: Terry Eagleton's keynote speech, for instance, was provocatively entitled 'The Enemy Within: English studies and the future of the humanities'; Francis Mulhern's lecture promised to advocate 'Firing

[35] Coles, J. (1991) *Teaching 'Shakespeare'*, unpublished Master's dissertation, Institute of Education, University of London

the Canon'. Other speakers included well-known left-wing activists and writers such as Tariq Ali, Hanif Kureishi and Christopher Hill. As a participant (I co-led a session about the teaching of Shakespeare) and as someone used to the rather more fevered environment of annual NUT conferences, I found the proceedings to be more decorously academic than revolutionary. Yet press reports gave the distinct impression that participants were about to storm Government offices and overthrow state education. The *Sunday Telegraph* dubbed Eagleton 'the Scargill of the 90s' (cited in West, 1992). Predictably, critical comments about teaching grammar and Shakespeare were seized upon. The *Daily Telegraph* report, 'Toppling the English citadel' (Clare, 1991) summarised the conference thus:

> English teaching is rapidly being emerging as one of the principal ideological battlegrounds of the Nineties...At the weekend, some 400 Left-wing teachers and lecturers gathered at Ruskin College, Oxford, to discuss how to wrest control of the subject from the Right. United by a belief that great literature and correct grammar and spelling are instruments of class domination, they debated tactics for subverting the stranglehold of A levels and 'empowering the kids'.

In this article and elsewhere, speakers from the London Institute of Education were singled out for particular censure amidst a feeding frenzy which persisted over a number of weeks. Whilst the conference itself probably had minimal effect in the grand scheme of English teaching, the immediate toxic fall-out was disproportionately felt: for example, at least one Local Authority English adviser was required to account for his attendance to his employers (see West, 1992); and senior managers at the Institute of Education adopted a defensive lock-down position with regard to publications critical of government policy (evidenced in personal correspondence concerning the potential publication of my MA dissertation).

The attempt to close down debate as witnessed in the two anecdotes I have recounted here, and the blatant class interests at work in the formulation of policy (or, as with the Language in the National Curriculum project, the summary

cancellation of policy – see West, cited above), convinced me as a relatively new teacher that only a collectively political response on the part of teachers would do; and that questions about curriculum construction, including the imposition of compulsory Shakespeare, are always ideological. Such incidents have been an indelible part of my formation as a teacher, union member and researcher.

3.2 Raising Questions

As indicated by my literature review in the previous chapter, a number of positive claims are commonly made about 'active Shakespeare', yet supported by little empirical evidence; further, National Curriculum policy has been shaped by similarly untested assumptions about the essential benefits of studying a Shakespeare play. I want to investigate these suppositions in real classrooms. Additionally, my review of the critical traditions and currents evident in the way Shakespeare has been thought about and examined over a period of fifty years (academic conventions within which the majority of current English teachers would have been professionally and intellectually formed) raise questions as to the ways English teachers might construct Shakespeare discursively and pedagogically in the Key Stage 3 or 4 classroom. Therefore, as a result of my three-part literature review, I refined and further developed my original research questions:

- How do English teachers construct the entity 'Shakespeare' in the secondary school classroom, including the following possibilities:
    - as drama?
    - as a literary text?
    - as 'high culture'?
    - as a symbol of Britishness?
    - other?

- What range of literary critical approaches do teachers adopt?

- What model(s) of reading do teachers and their students adopt? In what ways do students in urban classrooms site themselves in the process of reading a set Shakespeare text, eg:
    - as passive recipients?
    - as active, critical meaning makers?
    - as cultural producers?
    - other?

- Do the claims made by proponents of 'active Shakespeare' hold up to scrutiny, such as:
    - breaking down cultural barriers;
    - encouraging social and imaginative engagement;
    - enabling students to become agents of their own learning;
    - increasing motivation?

I am interested in how meanings are (re)produced in classrooms, how politically driven education policy at a macro level is understood and enacted in the day-to-day interactions of teachers and their students. My ontological assumptions mean that within this broader historical context people, their social interactions and their own interpretations of specific events will move into the centre of my research attention rather than Shakespeare *per se*. Thus, social constructivism provides an overarching analytical framework, where 'knowledge is constructed in processes of social interchange' (Flick, 2009, p.71). The nature of such inquiry necessitates qualitative research methods, methods which can be sensitive to the nuanced behaviours and responses of differentially situated participants.

In this study I have adopted what Green and Bloome (1997) refer to as an 'ethnographic perspective', (p.183) as distinct from 'pure' ethnography in its fully realised anthropological form (Lutz, 1993). This borrowing from ethnographic methods is defined as exploring 'particular aspects of everyday life and cultural practices of a social group', making use of 'theories of culture and inquiry practices derived from anthropology or sociology to guide the research' (Green and Bloome, 1997, p183). However, given the specific epistemological framework suggested by

my research questions above, I have been keen to avoid the kind of self-contained study which is narrowly and exclusively focused on immediately observable social phenomena (Quantz, 1992). Sharp (1993, p.121) argues for a 'political rationale' for ethnography: she suggests that 'micro-studies' tend to limit interpretation to narrow perspectives of what is 'naturally' observable in a classroom instead of embedding such phenomena in a wider social and political context. As Carspecken and Apple (1992) state, education is:

> …deeply implicated in the formation of the unequal cultural, economic, and political relations that dominate our society. Education has been a major arena in which dominance is reproduced and contested, in which hegemony is partly formed and partly fractured in the creation of the common sense of a people (p.509).

Sharp (1993) thus seeks to position the researcher ideologically, employing qualitative approaches which 'can elaborate the relationship between phenomenal forms, the world of appearances and deeper social structural causal mechanisms' (p.120). I am therefore making a distinction between the particular social constructivist position I am adopting and postmodern perspectives, many of which derive from Foucault's notions of power and knowledge (Foucault, 1980), rejecting the classical Marxist concept that the class with the economic power also enjoys cultural and political power. Such studies often focus attention on the way intersecting webs of power may be more fluidly constructed within social practices and through language (eg., MacLure, 2003). My understanding of the workings of social constructivism, on the other hand, takes Scott and Morrison's definition as a starting point:

> ...discourses, power networks and social arrangements...are inventions of groups of people in society and these groups of people are stratified so that those who have greater control of resources in society are in a better position to determine future arrangements for social life (2007, p.223).

But my understanding is further influenced by neo-Marxists such as Williams and Bourdieu (see Chapter 1), where any consideration of the cultural superstructure is inextricably related to the underlying economic base. From this epistemological perspective what can be observed in specific school classrooms ultimately cannot be separated from a broader social and historical understanding of schooling as an ideological system (Hill et al., 1999).

I do not, however, accept that the adoption of a neo-Marxist paradigm necessarily leads to a reductive and deterministic analysis of the relationship between teachers, their students and the system of schooling within which they find themselves situated.[36] Instead, I believe the relationship to be more complex and contradictory, including a crucial recognition that human beings have agency (Sanders et al., 1999) and that schools can be sites of opposition and struggle (McLaren, 1997; Moore, 1999). This latter point is highly relevant to my study in that the original Shakespeare SATs (indeed, the very formation of early versions of the English National Curriculum) were vigorously contested by teacher trade unions and other campaigning groups over a number of years in the early 1990s, a campaign in which I was actively involved (for an account of the SATs boycott, see Coles, 1994).

If a researcher is motivated by overtly ideological concerns, then the notion of reflexivity ought to be a key concept in such analyses, where 'researchers' own interpretive processes and authorial position' must be counted as part of the research (Goldbart and Hustler, 2005, p.17). According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), reflexivity is fundamental to all ethnographic practice:

[36] The classic example of which is to be found in Bowles and Gintis (1976) study of *Schooling in Capitalist America* .

> …the fact that we are part of the social world we study, and that there is no escape from reliance on common-sense knowledge and on common-sense methods of investigation (p.25).

This is a recognition that researchers are socially located themselves. Eisner (1998) develops this notion further. He suggests that since the human mind mediates the world through experience, both past and present, shaped by a broader cultural context, then:

> The conceptual framework we employ directs our attention in particular ways and therefore what we experience is shaped by that framework (p.28)

Therefore, I have endeavoured to highlight my own actions, decisions and motives as a researcher as part of the analysis too (Hammersley, 1983).

3.3 The research design

Flick (2009) describes qualitative research as a process of circularity rather than linearity, within which key elements are interlinked. In order to provide the necessarily multifaceted view raised by my research questions, a variety of data gathering approaches is needed. Case study offers an appropriate organising frame (Stark and Torrance, 2005), a focus for a variety of forms of social inquiry, an approach which in particular 'lends itself to the study of processes and relationships within a setting' (Denscombe, 2010, p.55) and in the depth necessary. The prime object of attention is the Shakespeare unit of work as a social event in real classrooms. Since an individual unit of work within the KS3 or 4 curriculum is quite limited in scope and time (a single teacher, with one class for approximately 5 or 6 weeks, working with one playtext), I chose a multiple-case design (Yin, 2009)

consisting of the teaching (and reception) of a set Shakespeare play in four different classrooms, across two schools.

My case study investigation has a dual purpose, both exploratory and illustrative (Denscombe, 2010), in that my research questions relate back to theoretical claims made by proponents of active Shakespeare, yet also raise open questions about the ways in which teachers construct Shakespeare discursively and pedagogically in the classroom. Thus, the sites (schools and English departments) were selected not as 'outlier' cases (Thomas, 2011, p.77) but as more akin to Yin's category of a 'representative' case (2009, p.48), although I am not claiming to have scientifically selected 'typical' schools and departments. In any case, within those schools and departments (details to follow below), the four individual teachers volunteered to be part of the research and were not selected by me. Clearly, I am not seeking to generalise. Rather I am seeking to gain understanding of the ways in which four different teachers produce a Shakespeare unit of work in specific classrooms, and the ways in which their groups of pupils interact with it. My aim is to generate 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) in all its depth and complexity, not to establish laws. The case boundaries are marked by time constraints, in other words the time it takes to teach a Shakespeare scheme of work, although I have contextualised the case studies within a broader historical and political frame (Stark and Torrance, 2005), as discussed earlier.

Critics of case studies have traditionally highlighted the problem with generalisability (Cohen et al., 2000; Yin, 2009). Thomas (2011) argues that generalisation should not be considered relevant to case study approaches, rather the emphasis should be on 'getting a rich picture and gaining analytical insights from it' (p. 23). However, Yin (2009) suggests that the case can be considered as one of a type, a specific example of a broader class. Somewhere between these two positions, within the account of my research I aim to include sufficient detail for a reader to make an informed judgement about how far the findings may be

related to other instances (Denscombe, 2010) , what Eisner (1998, p.103) terms the 'wider relevance' of particular cases. It is worth noting that I am attempting to offer a credible 'representation' of the reality of these classrooms rather than claiming to 'reproduce' it (Hammersley, 2002, p.73).

Undertaking a literature review revealed that cultural analyses of current Shakespeare practices in secondary school is an under-researched area. Case studies published on the RSC website (RSC, 2008) include insufficient methodological detail to be able to make judgements about their rigour, whereas the larger scale, formal evaluations of the Learning Performance Network Programme (Neelands et al., 2009, Galloway and Strand, 2010) rely heavily on quantitative analysis of surveys. In seeking models of research design I therefore looked at a variety of ethnographic studies which focus on actual classroom practices and the way specific forms of knowledge are constructed. Edwards and Mercer's (1987) investigation into the ways 'common knowledge' is built up through everyday classroom interactions provides an example of the usefulness of video data gathered in classrooms. Mercer's separate account of their research project emphasises the usefulness of their strategy in retrospectively selecting relatively small classroom episodes for close analysis (Mercer, 1991). Their analysis of lessons exemplifies the benefits of having the facility to review recordings along with verbatim transcripts, a process which led Edwards and Mercer to significantly modify their initial impressions of specific classroom interactions. Besides, since I am interested in the way drama is used to teach Shakespeare, preserving a visual as well as an audio record has an obvious advantage. Edwards and Mercers' (1987) rejection of the kind of formal, schematised discourse analysis pioneered by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) or Stubbs (1983) is useful for me: they argue that classroom dialogue relies on much more than language to make sense, and that any claims to greater objectivity arising out of formal linguistic analysis are overstated, in that any analysis of classroom discourse is ultimately reliant on the individual researcher's interpretation of what is said.

The focus of Kress *et al.*'s 'production of school English' project (2005) is perhaps closer to my current study in its concerns with the way classroom practice is shaped by broader ideological concerns, institutional constraints as well as teacher-student interactions. In this the researchers develop multimodal perspectives of classroom practice, using social semiotic theory as an analytical tool. Data were gathered from classroom observations and video recordings of lessons in three schools, interviews with small groups of students, in-depth interviews with teachers, and from policy documents, data gathering methods that will be of direct use to me.

In their study of what constitutes literacy practices within certain subject areas, Castanheira *et al*. (2001) develop what they term, 'interactional ethnography'. This involves a method of contrast, ' a set of iterative processes' (p.358), where for example, pupils' perspectives are set against those of their teachers, and contrasting types of data are mapped one against the other (such as transcripts, student artefacts, state documents etc). This method leads them to distinguish between the notion of an 'enacted curriculum' and the 'observed curriculum'. The former assumes that there is a straightforward relationship between the curriculum as enshrined in policy documents and plans; the latter recognises that what actually happens in classrooms is shaped by a complex web of local contexts and interactions.

For my study I wanted to examine the teaching of Shakespeare in Key Stages 3 and 4, where it is compulsory under the terms of the National Curriculum. In most schools, a set Shakespeare text is studied at some point in Year 9 (at the time of my research this was dictated by the end of Key Stage 3 national test in May); and a second Shakespeare play is studied as part of the GCSE English/English Literature syllabi (at the time of my research this was usually a play selected by the individual teacher or department and assessed through coursework).

Appropriate to the scope of a study of this nature with a single researcher, I focused on two London comprehensive schools, both chosen for their mixed intake of students (in terms of social class, ethnicity and gender). Both are successful, oversubscribed local authority run schools, one situated in inner London and one situated in outer London, both with well established English departments. In many ways the schools are similar in their construction as all-ability comprehensive schools, but they operate in contrasting local contexts. A detailed description of each school follows (see section 3.6 below).

3.4 Ethical considerations

An overall aim of this research is to contribute to teachers' understanding of specific processes involved in the teaching of Shakespeare, with the ultimate purpose of benefiting the young people in their classes (and, of course, prompting critical questions about current Government policy). However, any case study is likely to be heavily dependent on the good will of participants in terms of time and inconvenience. Whilst needing to observe teachers and pupils over a number of hours in the classroom, plus conducting interviews, I endeavoured to minimise intrusions as far as possible. When planning and executing the research, I followed the BERA Ethical Guidelines (BERA, 2004), particularly with regard to my dealings with young participants.

A basic principle of my approach to schools, teachers and pupils was that they were voluntarily taking part and that I needed to be as open as possible. Informed consent was obtained initially through informal personal contact with the respective heads of department; subsequently via a formal letter to each head teacher (see Appendix A) spelling out the purpose and nature of the research (also attaching a previously published article of mine, Coles, 2004). In each department two volunteers were invited to take part by the head of department at a department meeting, and in an initial meeting with each of the volunteer teachers I

further explained the research, answered any questions and ensured that teachers understood their rights to withdraw at any point. For pupils, I wrote a template letter (see Appendix B) which was then processed by each school according to their individual protocols. In one school (Eastgate), we agreed to use implied consent (Thomas, 2011), in that the letter assumed consent unless parents/pupils returned a reply slip stating that they wished to opt out. In all four classes we successfully obtained consent for every pupil[37].

All names in the research – of schools, teachers and pupils – have been anonymised by the use of appropriate pseudonyms; certain unique details of each school have been omitted in this report to minimise opportunities for identification. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that within a case study it is much more difficult to completely hide the identities of people, particularly, for example, within the groups of participants themselves (Flick, 2009). Therefore, I have tried to be sensitive when making judgements about use of classroom data which might in retrospect cause individuals some embarrassment if published. I remain aware that, as a researcher with access to recordings of lessons and teacher conversations, I am in a privileged position and one that could easily lead to an abuse of trust (Edwards and Mercer, 1987). I am painfully aware that many of the lessons I myself taught over twenty years of classroom teaching would not stand up to retrospective scrutiny by fellow practitioners; it is therefore worth stating that my intention is not to be critical of individual teachers over the course of the next two chapters, but to gain a better understanding of the educational processes involved in teaching a set Shakespeare text at a particular moment in national curricular history.

3.5 An overview of data collection

[37] I did not specifically ask for permission to publish any photographic/video images from the recordings I made; in retrospect this was an omission as multimodal analyses using screen grabs could have offered additional, rich sources of evidence.

Yin (2009) argues that a major advantage of case study data collection is the opportunity to use multiple sources of evidence. With a multiple-case design (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2009) an ongoing concern of mine has been to maintain a coherence of approach across the four classroom sites, and to pull the various forms of data together to form what Yin calls 'converging lines of inquiry, a process of triangulation and corroboration' (2009, pp.115-6).

I believe that the key strength of this inquiry is the emphasis on direct classroom observation, totalling over 28 hours. I observed and videoed a sample of Year 9 and Year 10 Shakespeare lessons, each over a separate half term period, focusing on one year 9 and year 10 class in each school. Following each period of observation I interviewed small groups of students from each class in order to ascertain their views about Shakespeare and their reflections on experiences in the classroom. I also interviewed each of the four teachers about their perceptions and beliefs. All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. As a supplement to the interview data, I gave each class a questionnaire asking them about their previous Shakespeare experiences and their preferred teaching methods in the classroom (68 questionnaires returned in total). I also surveyed each English department member about their philosophical/theoretical approaches to the study of Shakespeare in school (12 responses received in total). I gathered additional documentation from each school, including background data for each class; relevant schemes of work where they existed; and a written end of unit essay from a sample of students completed towards the end of the period of study. See Table 3a (below) for an overview of data collected. More detailed discussion of the methods of data collection and data analysis follows in later sections of this chapter.

Table 3a: A summary of data collected

1. **Video observations of lessons:**
   - 6 double lesson observations (approx 9 hours. 30mins video) year 9 in Ea school;
   - 9 lesson observations (approx 9 hours video) year 9 in Pa school
   - 5 lesson observations (approx 5 hours video) year 10 in Ea school
   - 5 lesson observations (approx 5 hours video) year 10 in Pa school

2. **Pupils' written responses:**
   - practice SATs question Ea school (whole class)
   - practice SATs question Pa school (5 pupils' responses selected by teacher)
   - review questionnaire following TIE group visit Pa (11 pupils' responses selected by teacher)
   - GCSE coursework essay, first drafts and final drafts of 6 pupils Pa school (selected by teacher)
   - GCSE coursework essay, sample of first drafts and final drafts Ea school, selected by teacher

3. **Pupil questionnaires**
   - 18 responses from year 9 Pa
   - 16 " " year 9 Ea
   - 19 " " year 10 Pa
   - 15 " " year 10 Ea

4. **Teacher questionnaires**
   - 5 responses from Ea English Dept
   - 7 responses from Pa English Dept

5. **Pupil Interviews:**

Small group interviews (approx 4-5 pupils in each group).
   - 2 interviews with sample from year 9 Pa
   - 2 interviews with sample from year 9 Ea
   - 2 interviews with sample from year 10 Pa
   - 2 interviews with sample from year 10 Ea

Total: approx 4 hours (all audio-taped and transcribed)

6. **Teacher interviews:**
   - Individual interviews with each teacher under observation: 4 in total (approx 4 hours audio-tape, transcribed)

7. **Other:**
   - class data (ethnicity, prior attainment etc)
   - field notes taken during every school visit
   - photos of group Shakespeare 'project' work (Yr9 Parkside school)
   - scheme of work for yr 10 R&J from Parkside; scheme of work for yr 9 Macbeth Eastgate; (none available for yr 9 Macbeth Pa); sow for yr 10 Henry V (Ea)

8. **National policy documents/Ofsted reports**

Timings of observational visits to each school were completely dependent on the individual teacher's schedule for teaching the Shakespeare unit. In keeping with common practice, both departments tended to cover the set Shakespeare play in year 9 during the Spring term. By co-incidence, both of the GCSE teachers had decided to teach the Shakespeare play during the Summer term of year 10 (see Table 3b).

Table 3b: data gathering schedule

	Spring term year 1	**Summer term year 1**	**Spring term year 2**	**Summer term year 2**	**Summer term year 3**
observation	**Eastgate** Year 9 lesson observation *(teacher: Marie)* *May: SATs*	**Eastgate** Year 10 lesson observation *(Beth)* (*abandoned because of schedule changes)*	**Parkside** Year 9 lesson observation *(Felicity)* *May: SATs*	**Parkside** Year 10 lesson observation *(Pip)*	**Eastgate** Year 10 lesson observation *(Beth)*
Interviews & questionnaires	Department questionnaire	Interviews with Eastgate yr9 students and teacher	Department questionnaire	Interviews with Parkside yr9 students; yr 10 students and their teachers	Interviews with Eastgate yr10 students and their teacher
other data	Shakespeare posters; practice SATs essay; TIE evaluation		practice SATs essay	coursework essays (first draft/final draft)	coursework essays (first draft/final draft)

3.6 School contexts: Parkside High and Eastgate School

I chose to locate the study in two mixed, ethnically diverse 'community' comprehensive schools situated on the same side of London, one in an inner London borough, the other in outer London. These are locations and types of institutions familiar to me from my own teaching career. For the purposes of my research I did not want either of my schools to present 'extremes' of practice or of

performance; for example I avoided approaching schools under 'special measures' where the attention of teachers in any department might be distracted by more pressing organisational concerns than subject development and pedagogy. I was also careful to select two schools where senior management teams appeared to be supportive, enabling the well established English Departments to largely set their own development agendas. Both English departments are engaged in the training of teachers, having long-established links with two different University education departments. In many respects, including GCSE exam results, Parkside and Eastgate could be said to be 'standard' comprehensives; both are locally popular, and rated by Ofsted as good or better. The two schools were inspected by Ofsted in the eighteen months before the period covered by my research and both achieved successful inspection reports, with Parkside gaining the top grade and Eastgate classified as 'good with some very good features' (the second best grade). Both schools are notable in different ways for the raising of pupil attainment: Parkside has over recent years built a reputation as a school which has pioneered Assessment for Learning work; Eastgate has won plaudits for its success in raising the achievement of Black boys. The more detailed descriptions of the individual schools below are based on data taken from Ofsted Reports and from each school's website.

3.6.1 Parkside High is a large, oversubscribed 11-19 comprehensive situated in outer London. It is a socially and ethnically mixed school with the predominant ethnic groups being Indian, white British and Pakistani. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals at 26% is above the national average of around 17%. The last Ofsted inspection praised the strong learning culture, the harmonious relationships between diverse pupils and characterised the environment as one where "very good teaching promotes very good learning". The school's website makes it clear that it is proud of its high academic achievements. Although there are relatively high numbers of students with English as an Additional Language, in the year of my research 67% of its year 11 cohort achieved five or more high grades at GCSE; 93% of its year 9 students achieved at least level 5 in the Key Stage 3

English SATs, putting it in the top 5% of schools with a similar intake according to Ofsted. At the time of my research Parkside had 14 statemented pupils on roll (approximately 1% of the total).

3.6.2 Eastgate School is an inner London 11-16 comprehensive school, noted by Ofsted as having an intake "skewed towards boys" (over 60%), over one third of its intake eligible for free school meals and a significant number of students living in care. Ofsted describes the surrounding area of London as a 'crime hotspot', with high levels of deprivation, street crime and drug abuse. Ethnically very diverse, Eastgate's main groups are white British, African Caribbean, Turkish and Kurdish, many of whom are at early stages of learning English. Locally, Eastgate is a popular, oversubscribed school and, because it draws on a socially mixed catchment area, it achieves a balanced comprehensive intake (as measured by the Local Authority's three 'achievement bands'). Achievement at GCSE is well above average in comparison with schools in similar circumstances: in the period of my research 44% of its year 11 students achieved five or more high GCSE grades and 61% a level 5 or better in KS3 English SATs tests. Ofsted inspectors particularly picked out the commitment of teaching staff for praise, along with strong teamwork across the school. At the time of my research Eastgate had 56 statemented pupils on roll (approximately 5% of the total).

3.6.3 The English Departments: I deliberately avoided choosing schools where I already had a professional relationship through my work as a PGCE tutor. I was concerned about the potential tensions involved in observing what were likely to be teachers who I had trained, a possible blurring of my role as a researcher and the very different role of a tutor responsible for supporting and formally assessing trainee teachers' performance. However, access to Eastgate and Parkside for me as a researcher was made easier to negotiate in that I had an existing point of contact in each department: both current Heads of English had completed MA studies (English in Education) in the early 1990s along with me. Gaining informal

agreement in principle from the head of department as a first step in each case facilitated the more formal process of negotiation with the head teachers; it also meant that other teachers in the departments appeared happy to take me on trust and I avoided any awkward period of introduction which might otherwise have occurred (see, for example, Ball, 1990). This was important given that I was seeking volunteers to allow me to enter their classrooms in order to observe and video lessons.

At Parkside there are approximately ten English teachers in what is a largely stable and experienced team. Kate, the head of department, has been teaching for over twenty years, and has been in her current post for six years. Eastgate is a slightly smaller department with eight dedicated English and media teachers; Beth, the head of department, has been teaching for approximately twenty years and at the time of my research had been in post for seven years.

Most departments at Parkside set pupils by attainment and the English department is no exception. At the time of my research all Key Stage 3 and 4 classes were divided into 4 levels of attainment, although as I recorded in my field diary, both Kate and her deputy, Felicity, were quick to assure me during our first meeting together at the school that they would prefer to teach mixed attainment classes, 'but the Head isn't persuaded that it's the best thing to do' (f*ieldwork notes*, 14:12:05). In contrast, English at Eastgate is taught entirely in mixed attainment classes throughout Key Stages 3 and 4, a long-standing arrangement embraced philosophically by members of the department with Senior Management approval.

Both departments benefit from dedicated teaching rooms and spacious department work rooms. The impression I received of the English departments during my visits to either school was of relatively close-knit teams who enjoyed harmonious professional relationships. One key organisational difference which has some

significance emerged during the study. Whereas the Eastgate English department works with agreed schemes of work which have been collaboratively created over a period of some years, at Parkside teachers work in a less centralised way. Thus, Felicity was not following a specific *Macbeth* scheme of work; Pip's SoW for *Romeo & Juliet* was one which she had submitted as an assessed project during her PGCE training the year before. This has significance when considering the way the series of Shakespeare lessons has been constructed at local level, whether by the department as an institution or by individual teachers.

3.7 Teacher sample

Each of the four teachers in the study volunteered to be part of the project, and in that sense they were self-selected and were therefore all likely to be confident enough as teachers of Shakespeare to welcome observation and filming; in each school one of the two volunteers was relatively new to the teaching profession, whilst the other had considerable experience and was well-established in their specific department. All four teacher volunteers happened to be female, but I have not identified any evidence to suggest that teacher gender is a significant factor in this piece of research.

3.8 Methods of data collection

3.8.1 Observation: Direct observation of Shakespeare lessons in the classroom appeared to offer me the most appropriate strategy to examine ways in which the four teachers were constructing Shakespeare for their students, and the degree to which student-teacher interaction contributed to this process. My professional familiarity with the settings and dynamics of London classrooms leant me a degree of insider knowledge, useful when deciding how to act, make context-sensitive decisions and position myself during lessons (Denscombe, 2010). Practical considerations meant that I would only be able to attend a sample of lessons for each of the four classes; these occasions were negotiated with each teacher, but in the event the sample of lessons was largely determined by my availability and

therefore represents a fairly random selection of lessons from each scheme of work (a minimum of 30% in each case: see Appendix C, tables C1, C2, C3, C4). I believe one advantage of this arrangement was to minimise the opportunities for any of the teachers either to 'cherry pick' lessons for me to see from the scheme of work, or to construct artificial 'show-piece' lessons. Each lesson was recorded on video using a single camcorder placed on a tripod at the back of the classroom in order to afford as broad a view of events as possible. Inevitably with the use of only one camera and its microphone the focus would be on the public 'official' discursive interaction of the classroom (and, therefore, likely to be teacher-led) rather than on students' group discussions or the kind of 'unofficial' exchanges recorded and explored by Rampton (2006). As a counterbalance I planned to interview a selection of students after the sequence of filming had taken place.

Because part of my purpose was to engage in an open exploration of how each of the teachers construct Shakespeare as an entity during lessons, I opted for an unstructured approach to the observation. I rejected more systematic observation schedules as inappropriate for my research questions and likely to be reductive of the complexities of classroom dynamics (Hammersley, 1993). Despite identifying some clear literary critical traditions from my literature review and historical analysis of examination questions, I was wary of imposing wholly preconceived ideas about what might be significant (Furlong and Edwards, 1993) and wanted to be able to review whole lesson data both visually and aurally at a later date (from video-recordings) in order to gain a 'holistic' view of the classroom (Jones and Somekh, 2005, p.140). I was able to supplement the selectivity of the camera with 'live' observational notes (Flick, 2009). During each visit I wrote brief contemporaneous field notes, jotting down any additional contextual information including comments the teacher might have said to me as we entered the room; headings, lesson objectives and so on written up on the white board; numbers of students in attendance; timings of each section of the lesson; resources used; salient moments; and occasional comments I picked up during lessons which were

made off-camera. These notes have been used to supplement other observational data where considered to be significant.

Feeling it was important to avoid interfering in the natural flow of the lessons, I initially adopted the low profile role of 'observer-as-participant' (Cohen et al., 2000, p.305) but as time went on in each class I found that it became more difficult to sustain that role and responded to students' requests for help at certain points, particularly in the more 'needy' environment of Eastgate classrooms. However, I was careful to preserve the 'naturalness of the setting' (Denscombe, 2010, p.206) as far as possible, and tried not to steer the direction of discussions or interfere in the ways in which a lesson was taught. I judged that leaving the camera running continuously on a tripod was likely to be less obtrusive than moving it around the classroom, or altering the focus according to my in-the-field interpretation of the ebb and flow of the lessons (Jones and Somekh, 2005).

3.8.2 Interviews: If observations were a way of enabling me to study teachers' and students' behaviour in the classroom environment and the way they (co-) constructed Shakespeare, I judged interviews to be the most appropriate method to enrich and complement the observational data by finding out what the participants themselves thought. As Kvale (1996) states:

> ..interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world (p.105).

Silverman (2006) suggests that interviews construct different representations of the phenomenon under study. From my own theoretical perspective, the voices of teachers and students had to form a significant part of this study and individual or small group interviews constitute a way of offering participants space for considered reflection. I am interested in teachers and students as agents who have been constituted differentially by their diverse social and cultural

backgrounds, who now find themselves together situated in a specific and complex ideological context. I therefore used individual interviews (lasting between 30 minutes and an hour) to probe each teacher's understanding of how they constructed Shakespeare; their attitude to 'active Shakespeare' as a pedagogy; what perception they had of their pupils' responses to Shakespeare (see Appendix D for key interview questions/prompts). With students, I wanted to explore their relationship to a specific play as a school and examination text, and prompt some discussion around their attitudes to Shakespeare as a cultural icon (see Appendix E).

Reciprocity becomes a particularly important concern in interviews. Holstein and Gubrium (2004) reject the notion that interviewers can be 'neutral, inconspicuous, little more than a fly on the wall' (p.140) and argue for a belief in the idea that all interviewing is active, 'interactional and constructive' (p.143). Miller and Glassner (2004) remind us that:

> The issue of how interviewers respond to us based on who we are – in their lives, as well as the social categories to which we belong, such as age, gender, class, and race – is a practical concern as well as an epistemological one or theoretical one (p.217).

I chose a semi-structured interview method (see Appendices D and E). This had the advantage of ensuring that each interview followed the same overall structure – and therefore the best opportunity to maintain a degree of coding consistency across the four case study units - but allowed a degree of spontaneous flexibility according to individuals' responses. The teachers were given a copy of the questions to read beforehand and interviewed at their convenience, whether in school or at home at a later date.

Whilst appreciating the definition of a research interview as a 'professional conversation' (Kvale, 1996, p.5), at the time of interviewing I was acutely conscious of the artificial nature of an interview and sought to put participants at their ease,

attempting to reduce the asymmetric relationship by use of non-verbal gestures, affirmative back-channels and other 'interjectory expressions' (Woods, 1986, p.77). As Cohen et al. (2000) warn:

> It is crucial to keep uppermost in one's mind the fact that the interview is a social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data collection exercise (p.279).

Nevertheless, there were obvious differences in my role when interviewing fourteen and fifteen year old school pupils (within a school setting) and that which was possible within the more equal professional dialogue I was able to have with the four teachers. However, even in the latter case with the teachers, I was aware that although we professionally shared a lived-in experience of English teaching in London schools, the research interview is *de facto* defined and controlled by the researcher (Kvale, 1996).

I had to make a decision about the most effective way of interviewing pupils. Given the restrictions of space and time in school, small group interviews offered a practical solution (Denscombe, 2010), as well as a safe and supportive environment for conducting and recording pupils' exchanges (Cohen et al., 2000; Denscombe, 1995). At its best, a group interview offers a distinctive approach which focuses on internal dynamics and interchanges of opinion (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987). However, there are a number of drawbacks. Kvale (1996) warns that group interviews are often a messy business, leading to difficulties in separating out respondents' voices. Strong individuals may dominate, or group psychology may result in more outlandish answers being proffered than if the interviewees had been questioned separately (Thomas, 2009). I assumed I would be able to overcome some of these problems in two ways: firstly by carefully constructing balanced and complementary combinations of students in each group with the assistance of each teacher (in reality, absentees of selected students on allotted interview days meant that groups were formed in a more ad hoc manner than originally planned); secondly, I began each interview with a short statements game designed to enable

individual voices to be heard in turn (see Appendix F). I conducted the interviews after I had completed each relevant period of classroom observation, enabling me to draw informally on that classroom knowledge within supplementary questions. Because of time constraints imposed by my own work schedule and by the pressure felt by teachers to cover the syllabus, the duration of each interview was largely determined by the need to complete two group interviews within one allotted lesson; they therefore generally lasted approximately 30 minutes each (slightly longer in the case of the Eastgate year 9 class where lessons were of one hour forty-five minutes).

3.8.3 Questionnaires: In order to further contextualise the observational and interview data, I designed two short questionnaires (see Appendices G and H), one for distribution to all teachers within both English departments and the other to be completed by all students within each class I observed. Questionnaires in this latter case offered an efficient way of capturing additional data from whole classes across both schools: economical in terms of both time and resources (Denscombe, 2010), although limited in scope. The purpose of the teacher questionnaire was an attempt to trace a cultural/ideological profile of each departmental team, focusing on attitudes to Shakespeare and preferred methods of teaching and assessing it. The questionnaire remained anonymous in the expectation that I was more likely to capture genuine responses rather than the answers each teacher thought I wanted. This has its limitations in that I have no idea which, if any, of the returned questionnaires my four participant teachers completed. Section A offered 18 statements reflecting commonly stated claims about Shakespeare's cultural status - many, for example, emerging out of the *Cox Report* (DES, 1989) and debates about Shakespeare teaching in the 1990s. Teachers were asked to identify the five statements with which they most agreed. Because it was such a small sample (10 English teachers in the Parkside department and 8 at Eastgate), I decided against adopting a rating scale; in any case I wanted to keep the questionnaire as simple as possible and I was interested in compiling an overall profile which reflected positively held beliefs, rather than a more sophisticated outline of each teacher's

views. For ease of completion, the layout of section A was a simple column of tick-boxes. Section B was sub-titled 'Teaching Shakespeare' and mostly offered a selection of dichotomous questions (Cohen et al., 2000, p.250) on the themes of teaching and assessment methods. Because of the restricted sample size, I appended an open-ended question inviting further comments. I left the questionnaires with each Head of Department for distribution to willing departmental members after the classroom observations and interviews had taken place. The Head of Department in each case posted the completed questionnaires to me at work.

The two key areas of focus for the student survey were on prior experience of Shakespeare and students' classroom preferences in covering a set play. I piloted a draft student questionnaire with a sample of twelve year 10 students in another London comprehensive school. At first the questionnaire continued over two sides in length and several of the students in the pilot did not turn over the page and complete the second side. I edited it down to one side before use in Eastgate and Parkside. The questions are linguistically very simple, most requiring tick-box answers, although again, with it being a relatively small sample (four classes in total), I felt able to mix closed questions with more open-ended ones. The questionnaires were distributed to all members present in each class at the end of an English lesson following completion of all observations and all group interviews. As I gave the questionnaires out I reiterated that the exercise was voluntary, responses were anonymous and that there were no right or wrong answers. The students handed the questionnaires back straight after completion, guaranteeing a high rate of return. In retrospect, I possibly should have traded off the advantages of anonymity with the greater advantage of the more nuanced analysis which would have been possible if I had asked pupils to identify themselves.

3.8.4 Documentary evidence: I used a variety of sources to support and enrich the key observational and interview evidence (Yin, 2009), including school websites

and published Ofsted reports; internal school data giving background information about each class (eg ethnicity and prior attainment); schemes of work (if available), teaching resources and worksheets; students' end of unit essays (see Tables 5a and 5b, Chapter 5, for overview). For internal school documents (class data, schemes of work and pupil essays), I was reliant on individual teachers for access, a process inevitably open to 'biased selectivity' (Yin, 2009, p.102), a problem I discuss later.

3.9 Analysis of data

3.9.1 Use of video: Notwithstanding the inevitable selectivity of a video camera, Silverman (2006, p.93) suggests that unstructured video recordings ensure a 'solid body of original data', avoiding narrowing down the focus of attention too soon. Denscombe (2010) claims that this serves to increase the reliability of data analysis, arguments which persuaded me that this was a productive approach. Placing the camera at the back of the classroom enabled me to gain a broad view of classroom activity, although some speakers at the back corners of the classroom are inevitably out of camera shot. The main disadvantages of this when it comes to transcription and analysis are that it is sometimes hard to identify exactly which students are speaking, and, given the arrangement of seats in the room, it is often difficult to see facial expressions. However, video data does help overcome two key challenges arising out of transcribed speech: that of identifying relevant contextual features, apparent to participants and therefore not encoded in speech alone; and facilitating interpretation of certain paralinguistic features where significant (Cook, 1995).

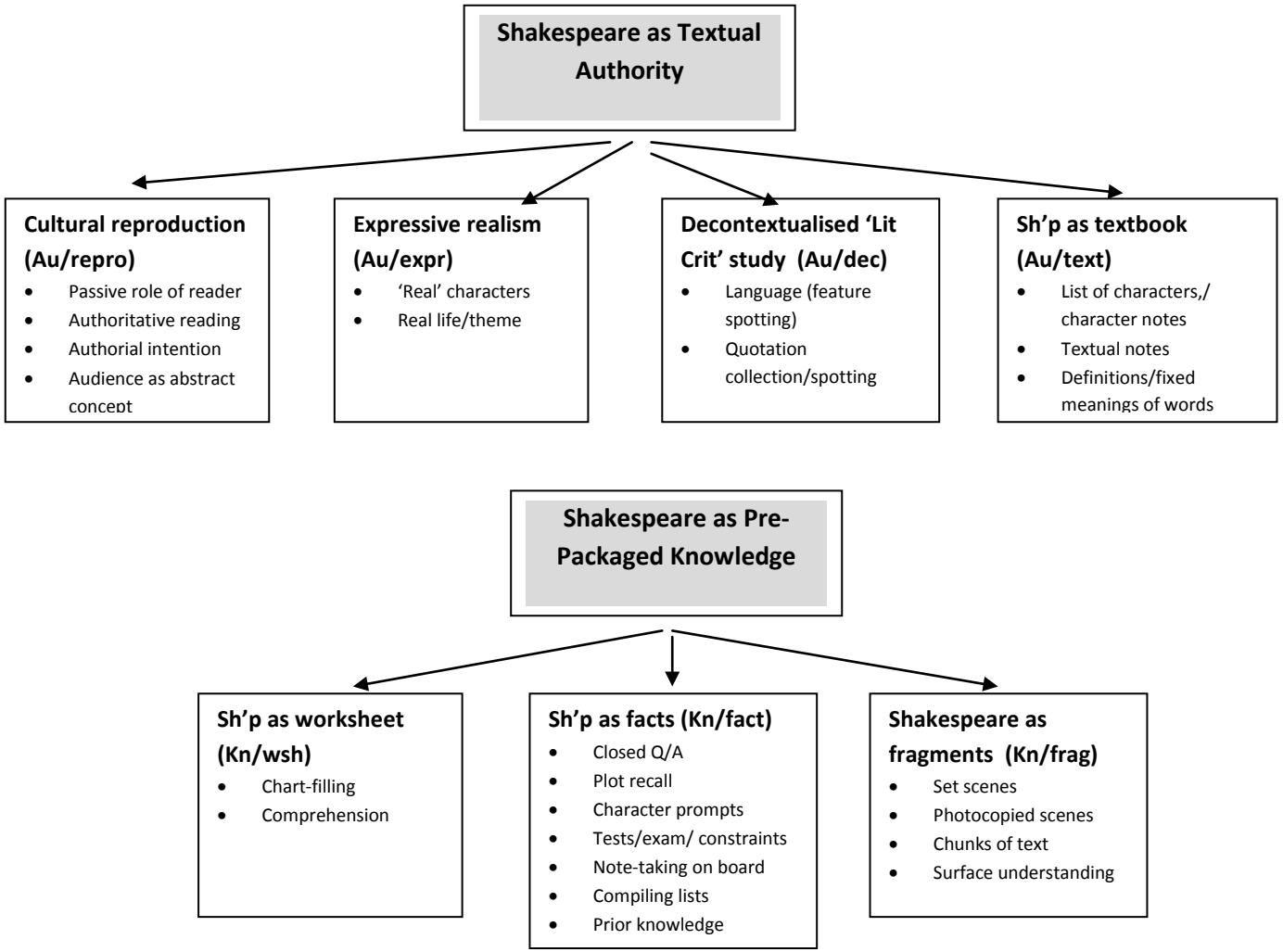
I recorded a total of just over 28 hours of video data in total, all of which I viewed alongside reading my field notes, then summarised and logged. From the lesson summaries, I selected 3 lessons from each sequence for detailed verbatim transcription, including in 3 out of 4 cases the opening lesson of the series (I was not able to fulfil my original intention to video all four opening lessons. I missed the first *Henry V* lesson at Eastgate when the teacher was forced by external circumstances to bring it forward by one day to a time I was not able to attend).

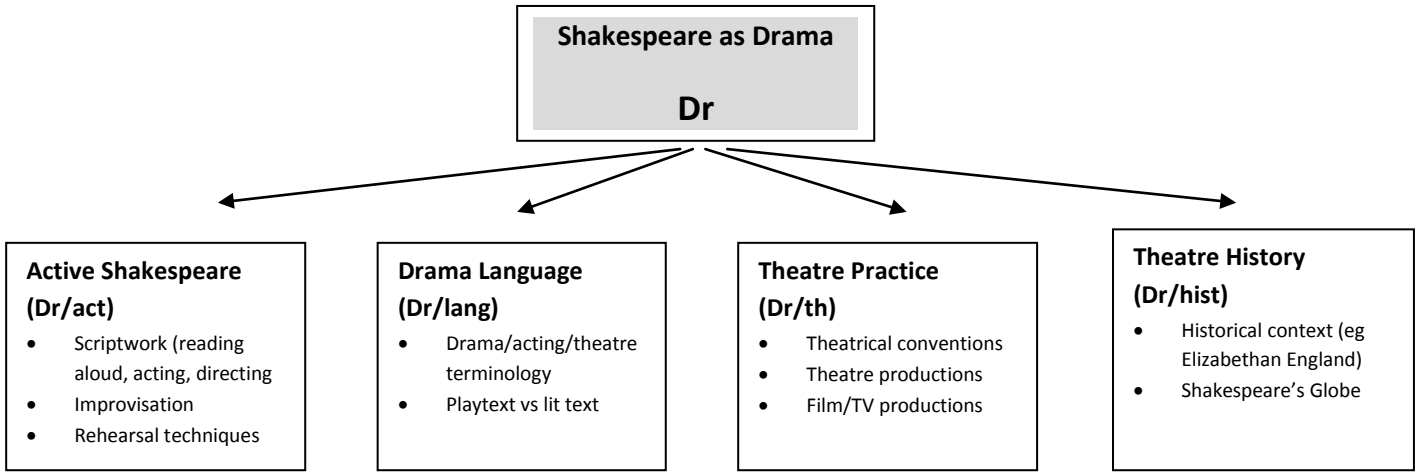
The selected lessons cover what I judged to be a range of activities and approaches typical to that teacher and class (see Appendix C). At first I compiled transcripts with 'context-notes' on the right-hand column (Mercer, 1991), but modified this design to indicate actions in parentheses within the main body of the text (rather like stage directions in a script) which enabled me to tie actions more directly to precise words (See Appendix I for sample page). In this way actions and sound are integrated, rather than the spoken text assume greater importance (Emmison, 2004; Jewitt and Kress, 2003).

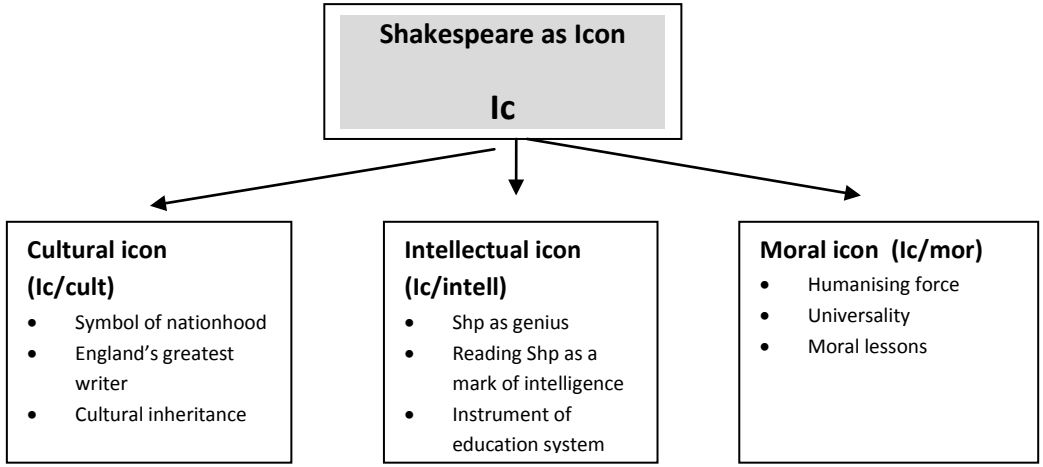
Lomax and Casey (1998) raise important considerations around the issue of reflexivity and video data. Whereas the traditional view coincides with that of Mercer (1991), that the camera is a relatively unproblematic tool, which has little effect on the activity being observed, Lomax and Casey present evidence to suggest that 'video methods…create and define the event and are therefore fundamentally part of the knowledge production' (para 8.5)). Their research into the interplay between midwives and new mothers clearly showed participants behaving in a self-conscious way towards the camera, partly arising out of an awareness of the permanence of what would otherwise be a transitory encounter. An obvious difference in videoing a whole class is that it is much less personal and intense than a one-to-one medical consultation. However, there are moments in my transcripts where one teacher in particular (Felicity) makes ironic and knowing asides straight to camera; and I note in my field diary that students in all four classes sitting nearest to the camera quite often shift their chairs a little uncomfortably as they settled down at the beginning of lessons. On the other hand, there is evidence that students were able to completely forget the camera was there: a vivid example of this occurred when a year 9 Eastgate boy deliberately (and dangerously) threw a pair of scissors at another student whilst the teacher's back was turned, then denied he had done this – seemingly oblivious to the fact that there was an adult witness with video evidence right behind him.

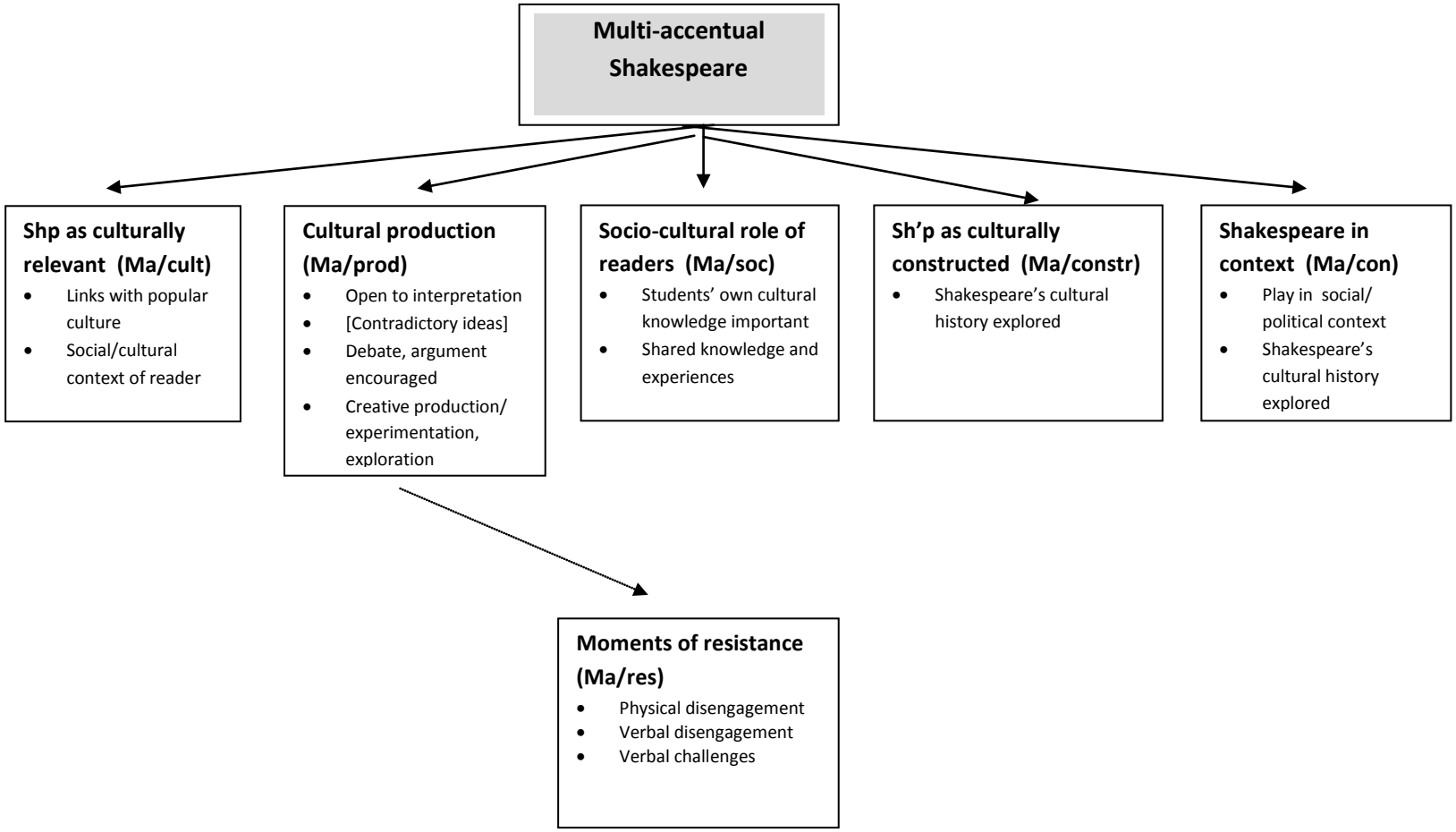
3.9.2 Coding of observational and interview data: Noting that 'selectivity is endemic' at every stage of observation, transcription and coding, Miles and Huberman (1994, p.56) promote a system of coding that explicitly uses the researcher's 'conceptual lenses' as a starting point in contrast to the 'grounded theory' of Strauss and Corbin (1998), where ideas and themes emerge from the data. I wanted to use a thematic coding system that would work iteratively at both an 'etic' level, and at a more specific 'emic' level (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.61). I therefore created a provisional list of codes arising out of my literature review and research questions, then worked line by line through the first batch of lesson transcripts, marking meaningful chunks of text – which might be as small as a single word or as long as four or five lines. Once completed, I reread the transcripts and highlighted aspects of the texts which did not fit the initial list of codes, a process of review which continued throughout the period of ongoing analysis (for example, I quickly realised I needed to add film and TV productions as a descriptive label alongside theatre productions, whereas 'moments of resistance' emerged as a conceptual code much later in the analytical process). I then began to pull the labels together, looking for patterns and working in an increasingly inferential way, revising codes as I went along. The following over-arching categories emerged from this extended process: Shakespeare as Drama, Shakespeare as Textual Authority, Shakespeare as Pre-Packaged Knowledge, Shakespeare as Icon, and Multi-Accentual Shakespeare. See figure 3a (below) for the final coding map applied to all observational and interview transcripts, conceived as a 'conceptual web' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 63). The category which evolved most during the iterative stages of this process was Shakespeare as 'pre-packaged knowledge', shaped by the unexpected frequency and consistency of this construct across all four classrooms.

Figure 3a Coding map




Shakespeare as Drama
Dr
Active Shakespeare (Dr/act)
Scriptwork (reading aloud, acting, directing
Improvisation
Rehearsal techniques
Drama Language (Dr/lang)
Drama/acting/theatre terminology
Playtext vs lit text
Theatre Practice (Dr/th)
Theatrical conventions
Theatre productions
Film/TV productions
Theatre History (Dr/hist)
Historical context (eg Elizabethan England)
Shakespeare's Globe


Shakespeare as Icon
Ic
Cultural icon (Ic/cult)
Symbol of nationhood
England's greatest writer
Cultural inheritance
Intellectual icon (Ic/intell)
Shp as genius
Reading Shp as a mark of intelligence
Instrument of education system
Moral icon (Ic/mor)
Humanising force
Universality
Moral lessons


Multi-accentual Shakespeare
Shp as culturally relevant (Ma/cult)
Links with popular culture
Social/cultural context of reader
Cultural production (Ma/prod)
Open to interpretation
[Contradictory ideas]
Debate, argument encouraged
Creative production/ experimentation, exploration
Socio-cultural role of readers (Ma/soc)
Students' own cultural knowledge important
Shared knowledge and experiences
Sh'p as culturally constructed (Ma/constr)
Shakespeare's cultural history explored
Shakespeare in context (Ma/con)
Play in social/ political context
Shakespeare's cultural history explored
Moments of resistance (Ma/res)
Physical disengagement
Verbal disengagement
Verbal challenges

3.9.3 Analysis of classroom dialogue: As indicated in an earlier section of this chapter, to best explore my research questions I have opted for an analytical approach focusing on broad discursive structures rather than close linguistic scrutiny. I have needed to adopt an analytical frame that not only enables scrutiny of the data according to literary, cultural and specific pedagogical influences and traditions (as outlined in Chapters 1 and 2), but also which is open to exploration of the way discursive structures contribute to meaning making in the social context of a classroom. Gee's (2012, p.3) sociocultural notion of Discourse (with a capital D) provides a productive starting point in considering the way classroom interaction works, incorporating 'ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing speaking', including reading and writing practices which mark out specific groups and contexts. Formal, linguistically-focused educational discourse analysis (eg., Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Stubbs, 1993) is not appropriate to my study as I want to explore broader educational processes within classroom contexts, shaped as they are by both linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena (Edwards and Mercer, 1987). Cazden (2001, p.101) likewise emphasises the need for an approach which is able to 'zoom out' from discourse features to the wider context when analysing classroom processes. Therefore I have adopted a combination of thematic coding as an overall organisational structure, in combination with something close to Barnes' (1976) 'insightful observation' of selected transcript episodes, defined by Edwards and Mercer (1987, p. 29) as 'reflective interpretation of the significance of the dialogue', where the complex relationship between teacher and students is regarded as potentially 'dialectical, even confrontational'. Communicative devices identified by Edwards and Mercer (1987, p.130), as part of their examination into the way that teachers and pupils build up 'common knowledge' together (such as through spontaneous contributions; teacher elicitations; significance markers; joint knowledge markers; cued elicitations; retrospective elicitation; reconstructive recaps; implicit presupposed knowledge), have provided me with a useful frame for analysing the degrees to which

teachers discursively establish and maintain control of what counts as knowledge in the classrooms under study. In addition, Cazden's (2001) and Wells' (1999) illuminative work around the 'default' I-R-F structure[38] of teacher-led questioning has also provided me with a valuable analytical tool for examining whole-class teacher-orchestrated episodes. Video recordings and verbatim transcripts of lessons of course mean that I have been able to examine specific moments of text, both verbal and visual, in close detail where this appears to be a productive line of inquiry.

All interviews were audio taped, then transcribed verbatim - a process which I chose to conduct myself in order to thoroughly familiarise myself with the data. I have tried to include sufficient para-linguistic features of spoken English to suggest emphases in intonation, pauses and emotional expressions to communicate a flavour of the original interviews, but accept Kvale's point that the very process of transcription renders the interview into a into a hybrid form, an oral discourse artificially transfixed then transformed into written mode (Kvale, 1996, p.166). The transcription conventions I used are listed in Appendix J. I have added what seems to be appropriate punctuation as suggested by speakers' intonation.

The process of analysis was complicated by the use of group interviews As Watts and Ebbutt (1987) point out, transcription is made more problematic by the way people talk over each other and occasionally it is difficult to accurately attribute voices. One drawback emerges particularly during the Eastgate interviews with confident and articulate students tending to dominate discussion (see below).

[38] A basic triadic structure which consists of: initiation by teacher; response by student; feedback provided by the teacher.

I adopted a method of collation which combined Ball's 'literal manipulation of data' (1991, p.182) and also importing the transcripts into NVIVO, a software program which enables a more sophisticated version of cut and paste, allowing me to search, manipulate and reorganise the data speedily in different ways. However, I discovered that computer programs are not purveyors of a mythic 'objectivity' – the initial coding and labelling exercises still rest on judgements made by the researcher. In the end I found the best way of working closely with the data was to paste up thematically linked chunks of interview text onto A3 sheets which I could then lay out on the floor and annotate with pencil.

For both the classroom and the interview data, I systematically collated instances of specific codes onto a set of grids (see Appendix K for an example) from which I was able to draw together patterns and frequency of occurrence, and, furthermore, identify episodes which might bear more detailed discourse analysis.

3.9.4 Questionnaires: Responses from the closed questions were collated as percentages on an Excel spreadsheet, then converted into tabular and/or chart format (see Appendices L and M). Any additional information given in response to the open-ended questions was grouped thematically and analysed separately (Appendix M). Analysis of these data is woven into interpretations of classroom observations and teacher or student interviews as appropriate in order to provide additional contextual information (in Chapters 4 and 5).

CHAPTER 4
SHAKESPEARE IN THE CLASSROOM[39]

Teachers transform lives as very few others can. They are there at the moments in all our childhoods when new horizons beckon...the moment a pupil who says she's never seen the point of books – or for that matter, school – sits enraptured by a performance of Hamlet (Education Secretary, Michael Gove, 2010)

In this chapter I want to focus on the ways in which Shakespeare is constructed within lessons, drawing directly on transcriptions of classroom observation, cross-referenced to what teachers say in their interviews.

As indicated in Chapter 3, once I had completed the coding process working directly onto the transcripts, the coded segments of text were collated into their broader categories and analysed in two different ways. Firstly, I conducted a type of content analysis which indicated the frequency of particular categories identified across the lesson transcripts and the interviews. Clearly, an analysis of this kind runs the risk of flattening the data, reducing complex discourse to numbers (Denscombe, 2010), and since I am working with what are essentially high inference categories (Scott and Morrison, 2007), I make no claim to quantitative reliability. However, an interesting summary picture emerges (see tables 4a and 4b, below) which supports the much more detailed discourse analysis which follows. A striking feature of the data summary is the high frequency of moments in lessons when Shakespeare is constructed as 'pre-packaged knowledge', particularly marked in three out of four of the teachers' practice, whereas I had expected to see and hear Shakespeare's iconic status taking a much more dominant place in classroom discourse.

[39] Parts of this Chapter (particularly those focusing on Marie's classroom practice) appear in:
Coles, J. (2009) 'Testing Shakespeare to the limit: Teaching *Macbeth* in a year 9 classroom'. *English in Education* 43: 32-49.

Table 4a: Lesson data: frequency of recorded incidences code by code

Lessons	**Ea9** 4 lessons	**Pa9** 4 lessons	**Ea10** 3 lessons	**Pa10** 3 lessons	**Total**
Category codes	*No. of recorded incidences*	*No. of recorded incidences*	*No. of recorded incidences*	*No. of recorded incidences*	*No. of recorded incidences*
Pre-packaged knowledge	52	43	19	38	152
Textual authority	28	29	27	45	129
Drama	32	11	23	20	86
Icon	3	18	9	19	50
Multi-accentual	14	4	24	14	56
Resistance	16	14	9?	4	33

Table 4b: Teacher interview data: frequency of recorded comments code by code

Teacher interviews	**Marie**	**Felicity**	**Beth**	**Pip**	**Total**
Category codes	*No. of recorded comments*	*No. of recorded comments*	*No. of recorded comments*	*No. of recorded comments*	*No. of recorded comments*
Pre-packaged knowledge	12	24	11	17	64
Textual authority	3	10	2	9	24
Drama	11	12	14	11	58
Icon	8	8	17	15	48
Multi-accentual	3	2	14	7	26
Resistance (system)	2	1	4	2	9

From the literature review I had hypothesised that the volunteer teachers in my study would have constructed each Shakespeare play as drama more frequently in the classroom (yet Shakespeare as drama emerges as a key feature of their interviews). The summary suggests some interesting patterns across classrooms, including some clear similarities of teachers' practice and spoken beliefs, alongside notable areas of difference, all of which are explored in more detail below with detailed verbatim reference to the transcripts. Results of the teacher questionnaires (see Appendix L) indicate broad differences in department beliefs and philosophies. However, the sample size is very small and therefore I provide the data to add contextual detail to the classroom data.

In the analysis which follows I use the over-arching category codes in turn as organisational sub-headings.

4.1 Shakespeare constructed as Pre-Packaged Knowledge

The predominant construction of Shakespeare to be found in the classroom data is as a reductive set of facts that can be learned or reproduced in alternative formats such as tables, lists or formulaic essays. Within this paradigm, exploration of a specific play tends to be limited to a routinised charting of features such as plot events, themes, or characters and their apparent characteristics. Students may only deal fleetingly with the printed playtext, and rarely read more than a small percentage of this text. Instead they are often reliant on photocopied scenes or chunks of text, so that the play becomes fragmented in the process, where individual scenes are highlighted for one reason or another and mined for certain information. In some instances, worksheets may replace the printed playtext as the main object of attention, a phenomenon previously identified by Kress *et al* (2005) in their analysis of the way subject English is constructed in urban classrooms. When interviewed, Marie points out that restrictions of time (for example, covering a play in less than half a term, sometimes as little as five weeks) in practice shapes the way a play is 'packaged', particularly in preparation for tests which focus on a narrow range of skills:

> **Marie:** ...I think most people find it restrictive, but the main, but the main trouble with the SATs approach is the sense of pressure that you were studying this because you have to, because you have to pass an exam in it and the feeling that all of the kids' knowledge is going to be, and understanding and liking for the play, is going to come down to one half hour stint of writing

Indeed, all four teachers in my sample are critical of the 'set scene' approach to the SATs, in the way that it fragments the text and in the way that assessment regimes reduce Shakespeare to an exam text. Felicity, Marie and Beth are also critical of the way that Shakespeare at GCSE is assessed entirely through a written

outcome. Pip sums up teachers' practice perfectly when she says: 'you've got to teach the essay rather than teach the text'.

4.1.1 Shakespeare as facts: In all four classrooms the cataloguing of facts about the specific play under study emerges as a central way of working regardless of an individual teacher's overall pedagogic approach. The garnering of facts may be effected orally (for example, through teacher-led whole-class question and answer sessions), or in writing by means of charts, lists and note-taking; written records may be made individually or in groups by students, or centralised by the teacher on the board. Beth is unique in that this fact-based approach plays very little part in the actual process of her students 'reading' the play (through watching the film and through various role-playing activities), but manifests itself through worksheets at the point of preparation for assessment.

An obvious starting point for dealing in what appear to be 'facts' is in the compilation of narrative recaps or plot summaries and this is an activity which occurs in all four classes (although to a lesser extent in Beth's work on *Henry V*). 'Knowing the story' is noticeably central to both year 9 classrooms. Both Marie and Felicity orchestrate whole-class plot summaries of *Macbeth* once the film version of the play has been viewed, pooling what Marie calls 'all the knowledge you have' and Felicity terms a 'list' of 'points'. While Marie asks her students to engage in a plot sorting activity, then copy the correct order down into exercise books, Felicity distributes a lengthy act by act plot summary photocopied from the Oxford schools edition of the play which is read aloud in class as a prelude to SATs specific work on the set scenes. Pip does not appear to be as concerned with her students knowing the plot of the whole play in quite the same way. Recaps in her classroom tend to be constructed through the prism of character as in the following example:

Sequence 4(1)

T: ...Does Benvolio seem like the kind of character who is happy about this fighting?
Ss: No

T: Right can anyone remember what he said? [Looks around the room]
Robert: Peace
T: Yeah, he said (2) Oh no, I've forgotten what he said now (.) but he says he wants peace, he doesn't want to fight. So he's the one who's trying to keep - "I do but keep the peace" he says. [smiles] I've remembered! He says, "Put down your swords, you don't know what you do" so he's trying to stop the fight, isn't he, so he's a very peaceful kind of character isn't he really. What then about Tybalt in (.) in relation to that?
Robert: He's the opposite
T: He says, 'I hates peace, I hate the word. Like I hate all Montagues, which is thee' which means you, so what kind of person is Tybalt then?
Kursheed: Mean
Meera: He doesn't care
T: He's mean, he doesn't care
Robert: He's quite rough
T: He's quite rough (.) What do you mean by rough?
Robert: [inaudible]
Anjna: He thinks he's cool
T: [Nods] Yes he thinks he's cool, he's the king of cats, he thinks he's very, very cool indeed. And he's a very angry character isn't he?

[Pa R&J1, pp.12-13][40]

Within a relatively open framework of eliciting student contributions (Edwards and Mercer, 1987), the teacher nevertheless maintains tight control of the dialogue, by repeating and occasionally reconstructing each contribution in turn. Thus, valued knowledge is filtered, shaped and marked as relevant by the teacher. The focus here is on what key characters say, and what this indicates about them rather than a list of events. This year 10 class will concentrate in detail on one scene only for their coursework essay, whereas the year 9 classes have to know three or four set fairly substantial scenes for an externally set and marked test; this may explain why the two year 9 teachers are more concerned with providing plot summaries. Beth is similarly free to set GCSE coursework which focuses on only three very short scenes, and therefore avoids the nagging sense of need to continually recap the plot of *Henry V.*

[40] [Pa R&J1] denotes that this sequence is an extract taken from the first *Romeo and Juliet* lesson I observed at Parkside; the page numbers refer to the pages of my transcripts.

Episodes of teacher-led closed questioning occur in all four classrooms. These are sometimes sustained for substantial periods of time, such as in Felicity's lessons where they form the main vehicle of teaching in 7 out of the 9 lessons observed, and most often are used to recap what has just been watched on a video, or in the following example immediately after reading a scene. Here the teacher's intonation (the emphasis on the word 'know'; firmness of tone for statements such as 'we don't'), or repetition of questions discursively mark out Gurmeet's and Rashid's suggestions in the first half of this sequence as incorrect:

Sequence 4(2)

T: ...Someone from over here [gestures] What have we found out about Macbeth?
Gurmeet: He knows the witches.
T: Do we know he knows them? We don't. Billy, what do we find out?
Billy: [unclear]
T: Do we know they know him? Personally?
Fatimah: No, they're meeting him.
T: They're going to meet him. We know they know of him. (2) And they're going to meet him (.) Do we know, Rashid, whether they've met him before?
Rashid: No
T: Do we know if Macbeth has met the witches before?
Ss: [various] No.
T: Where are they going to meet him, Rashid?
Rashid: Um, (.) upon the heath?
T: What's a heath?
Rashid: A hill?
S: [unclear]
T: It actually tells there you alongside it
Rashid: Oh, a wilderness.
T: Yes. An open space. They're going to meet him somewhere wild and open. (.) An open space. Right (.) when, when (.) are they going to meet again, William?
William: [mutters] 'when shall we three meet again?' Um, 'when the hurly burly's done'.
T: Uhuh. Next line?
William: 'When the battle's lost and won'.
T: And when will that be? Forhad?
Forhad: What?
T: When is the battle lost and won?
Forhad: Just after sun?
T: After sun? So? Three days later? A week later? When's it going to be? Hm?

Forhad: If it's thunder, lightning or rain?
Ss: [various] No, it's sun
T: No, before the setting of sun.

[Pa Mac3, pp.11-12]

What this amounts to is a kind of oral comprehension, where the teacher focuses on attempting to pin down a single meaning to the words rather than opening up the script to various interpretations. Students respond by almost turning the teacher-led dialogue into a guessing game (see Rashid's guess about the heath; and Forhad's various stabs at the right answer in the last 6 lines). Almost line by line decoding (even to the extent of defining 'heath') is prioritised over gaining a general sense of the scene as a whole, or an understanding of the theatricality of this opening scene. Even Marie, whose pedagogical approach is generally very different to Felicity's, regularly employs closed questioning, the effect of which is to reduce *Macbeth* to a set of knowable facts. Here for example she has begun her fourth lesson on the play with a set of questions on the board designed to recap the scene covered in the previous lesson:

1. What three things did the witches tell Macbeth?
2. What do the witches tell Macbeth?
3. What two questions does Macbeth ask the witches in lines 70-79?
4. How does Macbeth feel after meeting the witches?

[Ea Mac2, p.1]

Students are given three minutes to begin written answers, before Marie leads oral feedback, seeking out specific 'factual' responses to the questions. As a lesson starter activity, what this is in danger of communicating to the students is that reading literature is about locating 'right' answers, and that texts carry one set of meanings. In this example, the suggestiveness and slipperiness of the witches' prophecies are lost altogether.

Beth's use of questioning is generally more open, and she most frequently invites her students to imagine or explore rather than provide 'correct' answers. On the relatively limited number of occasions when her students are working with small

amounts of printed text, however, Beth also tests understanding by means of closed questions based on literal meanings of the words, as for instance in the following extract from the first recorded lesson (students had been working in pairs on small chunks of text):

Sequence 4(3)

T: ...what kind of things is Henry coming back to say to France?
S: It's war, it's er [unclear]
T: Yes, it's war, what's he using as a metaphor for war?
S: Tennis!
T: Yes, he's using lots and lots of words to do with tennis. To do with playing a match, to do with a tennis match, to do with batting back the balls, etc etc. OK, so, I don't think we've got time to read it [checks watch], so we'll read it next lesson. But he uses the tennis idea and he throws it back at Henry. What else does he do that you can say, what else does he threaten or say that he will do?
S: I'll take your throne
T: Ok, I'll come and take your throne... What other things is he threatening in any other of these speeches? Grace, what's he threatening in yours?
Grace: Send guns
T: Send guns, OK. And who's going to regret it? Don't interrupt! Who else is going to regret what the Dauphin's just done to Henry? (.) What people in France are going to regret it?
Grace: Mothers
T: Mothers and?
Grace: Sons
T: Mothers and sons, why? (.) What's going to happen? What's going to happen to the sons? Grace?
Grace: They're going to die in war.
T: Yes. They're going to die. A lot of people are going to die because of this insult.

[Ea HV1, pp.19-20]

Here Beth discursively marks out knowledge that is valued by repeating or expanding and developing students' contributions (Edwards and Mercer, 1987), creating a sense that knowledge about *Henry V* is being co-constructed in this classroom, despite the closed questions and I-R-F structure (Wells, 1999).

Much of Pip's teaching is supported by worksheets, for instance where students

have to match character descriptions with character names, followed by whole-class feedback. Only occasionally does she recap scenes just after they have been read through a series of closed questions. In the following example, she is seeking to check that the students understand the significance of the opening argument of the play between servants of the Montagues and of the Capulets. While observing in the classroom my impression was that the students and teacher were engaging in collaborative dialogue, but closer analysis of the transcript reveals otherwise. Until students are invited to suggest current equivalents for thumb-biting gestures, the nine conversational turns taken to establish that Gregory and Sampson are going to exchange dirty looks and gestures with the Montague gang are tightly controlled by the teacher, in most instances with students reduced to echoing the teachers' words ('frown', 'bite his thumb'):

Sequence 4(4)

T: So Gregory's going to frown as he passes by. What really in terms of what (.) you might do (.) in terms of a scuffle, what's Gregory going to do, what's he going to do?
S: Frown
T: Yeah, he's going to frown as he passes by: 'I will frown as I pass by'. So what's he going to do?
Ss: [various mutterings]
T: No, he's not going to say anything, what's he going to do? He's going to give a dirty look [mimes] like that, OK? And then, what's Sampson going to do? 'I will bite my thumb at them'.
S: He's going to bite his thumb?
T: He's going to do this [mimes] OK? That's an insult. What would that be (.) and please no-one do the action, what could that be in today's world?
Ss: [several students together] Oh, putting your middle finger up!
T: Yes, possibly putting your middle finger up (.) it was, it was an insult to do that to somebody. So Gregory's going to frown, give him the dirty look, Sampson's going to bite his thumb at them to see if he can wind the servants of the house of Montague up. OK?

[Pa R&J1, p.8]

And in a later lesson even when Pip prepares her students to participate in drama work (focusing on the party scene) the photocopied versions of the scene are prefaced by a lengthy printed plot summary of the play so far, which she proceeds

to read out loud to the class before they can get started on their group activity (see sequence 4(28), below). As a prelude to dramatic explorations, this is in danger of presenting the play as plot-focused and open to a fixed set of meanings, with the teacher in the seemingly essential role of story teller and translator.

Note-taking is another classroom activity which contributes to the perception that a specific play can be reduced to a set of knowable facts; this is a feature common to three out of the four classrooms in the study. In Pip's year 10 classroom students are prompted to write down notes which are deemed by the teacher to be of direct use in putting together the coursework essay. After reading the opening scene, then watching Luhrmann's film version, Pip begins to compile notes about the characters Benvolio and Tybalt on the board, mainly consisting of key words (eg 'ruthless', 'cold-hearted') listed under the two names. Prompted by a student's query, Pip asks the class to 'just jot this down for me'. In Felicity's classroom, students are on several occasions asked to compile lists of points on paper which then get transferred by the teacher into pooled notes on the board. In an early lesson Felicity instructs students to record in their exercise books the difference between talking about Macbeth (the character) and 'Macbeth' (the play). In Marie's classroom students are frequently asked to make notes, ranging from the key words/themes arising out of each improvisation in the first lesson (under the explicit title, 'Themes of *Macbeth*') to group feedback pooled on the whiteboard and copied down by all students. In fact, at times the note-taking can be so extensive that in the last lesson I observed not only were students complaining about the amount of writing, but even the teacher felt moved to comment about the extent of board-writing she has just completed:

Sequence 4(5)

Kwame: Miss, it's 10 o'clock
T: Yeah? (.) You're doing ever so well, I'm really impressed with this [circulates, checking progress]
Caitlin: Miss, can you write this, my hand's aching

T: Me write it? No I've been writing on the board, my hand's aching already.

[Ea Mac6, p. 21]

4.1.2 Shakespeare constructed as worksheet

All four teachers distribute information sheets or worksheets of some sort to their students during the observed lessons. Felicity tends to rely on photocopied character notes and plot summaries taken from Roma Gill's Oxford schools edition of *Macbeth* rather than creating her own charts or worksheets. Pip, Beth and Marie all make use of charts, tables and other worksheets to be completed by students both individually and in groups. Chart-filling, listing and logging information are recurring activities in two-thirds of the lessons I observed in Marie's class. Marie's charts are very often printed on A3 paper (or sugar paper) and designed for collaborative completion. In the opening lesson, themes are written up on the whiteboard after students have performed group improvisations, then copied down by the students; in the next activity the whole play is reduced to a list of events to be sorted into correct order, then copied down. In subsequent lessons students complete, for example, commercially produced 'fact-files' as a way of summarising notes about main characters (discussed in section 4.2.1 below); make lists of imagery on the white board; and repeatedly fill in tables which match 'fact' with quotation. Students complete a different chart for each set scene, plus one which revises the theme of 'power' across all set scenes as preparation for a practice SATs essay. Within Marie's class, very often drama activities and discussions undergo an abrupt transition into chart-filling or note-taking episodes, particularly once the students start to work on the set scenes, as is the case with the following example:

Sequence 4(6)

T: OK guys, what we're going to do is, each (.) each group that's worked on a particular scene, is going to work on that scene, and what we're going to do is to prepare for an essay question by filling in these great big lovely charts, [T picks up yellow sheet and points to it;] but so as not to task your brains by filling in the

whole lot we're going to just fill in the scenes you've just worked on. So as soon as you get the chart I'll talk you through it and how we're going to break it down...

[Ea Mac6, p.11]

Marie's grids are designed to facilitate collaborative study of the set scenes in preparation for the SATs test. Whilst providing a clear structure for students, the model of literary study these charts suggest is oversimplified and formulaic, where all a student needs to do is to fill in gaps. In this world of critical practice, surface knowledge is substituted for interpretation, with texts broken down into neat sets of concordances:

Sequence 4(7)

T: What we're going to do (.) is some work [holds up worksheets] on how Macbeth manipulates the murderers. [T hands out sheets while readers are still moving to various tables]. You will see [raises voice over shuffling, movement] two columns (2). In the first column (2) is three ways Macbeth manipulates the murderers, er, persuades the murderers to do this dirty deed. [Ss are now settled again] And in the second column there is a space for a quote to show where you got that idea from. So (.) this is basically the first two parts of the PEE formula (2). The point and the example (3). What we're then looking for is more ways in which Macbeth manipulates the murderers. [T drops voice to speak to front table] Are there any spare worksheets there? [Picks one up for herself], moves to front of room, looking down at sheet] So, let's have a quick look (.) it says in the first one, 'ways Macbeth manipulates the murderers'. Firstly [holds up one finger as if counting off] he tells them someone else has been responsible for their suffering. Then (.) [T holds up 2nd finger] he tells them it's Banquo's fault (2) then [T holds up another finger] he asks them if they are too good to murder. Now there's just 3 ways in which Macbeth attempts to manipulate the murderers to persuade them to do the job (.). Now, what I want you to do is find the quotes where he does each of these things and fill them into the blanks...

[Ea Mac3, p.6]

Reading and interpreting the text becomes something that can be counted off on the teacher's fingers. This accounting system provides students with two columns, three ways in which Macbeth behaves and a quotation that matches each. Students' own experiences and cultural knowledge are irrelevant (just fill in the blanks) and meaning is mediated by the teacher, bounded by a printed frame; the

Shakespeare text is quite literally boxed in, to the extent that at one point a student is concerned that whatever she writes must fit into the supplied box:

Sequence 4(8)

T: [begins writing on board as she speaks] 'Macbeth finds out where Banquo is going to ride in order to send murderers after him' OK well done. Someone else in the group. Who holds the power in this scene? [Turns to look at the class]
Zach: Macbeth
T: [writes] 'Macbeth'. Why? (1) What does he have that Banquo doesn't have?
S: [unclear, sounds of someone coughing]
T: No, he's got a plan, hasn't he? He's conniving (.) he's planning to murder (.) he (.) er -
Zach: - that's what we've written
T: [still facing the board] Oh good
Yasmin: [tone of dismay] It won't go in that box
T: I know, I'm just extending it a little bit [adjusts the line on the board and continues to write]. Is that all right?

[Ea Mac6, p.15]

Whilst not constituting the major activity in any lesson, Pip's students are nevertheless asked to complete some sort of sheet in every lesson observed. These include character charts asking students to match names with descriptions, a 'test your knowledge' sheet with short quiz-style questions covering key events of the play, character grids leaving gaps for student completion and a writing frame, all of which contribute towards the final coursework essay (considered in detail in a later section). The sheets assume a textual importance of their own, with repeated exhortations from the teacher to 'keep these sheets safely', or 'don't lose these sheets'. While looking at the first scene, Pip distributes photocopies of two speeches upon which she asks students to underline specific literary devices (for example, oxymorons in one of Romeo's speeches). Despite Pip's promise to discuss how these features relate to 'Romeo's character' this discussion does not take place in this lesson, nor does she suggest that such a discussion might contribute to any understanding of the play beyond 'character'. Using the teacher's definition of oxymoron written on the board, students are

asked to pick out examples; during the whole-class feed back the teacher's response appears to suggest that correct identification is more important than interpretation:

Sequence 4(9)

T: OK, we'll get some feedback, then. Actually almost everything in this speech are oxymorons (.) and we're going to talk about what the effect of those oxymorons actually are on what we find out about Romeo's character. Who can highlight another one for me. We've already had about loving hate [Looks round the class] (2) Is your hand up Asha? (2) Azra?
Azra: Cold fire?
T: Cold fire, yes. Absolutely. Er, yes? Saba?
Saba: Without eyes
T: Without eyes?
Saba: Without eyes sees pathways to his will
T: Without eyes see pathways to his will. He's looking without eyes, OK. Joe?
Joe: That feel no love in this..
T: This love feel I that feel no love in this, so he's contradicting himself saying one thing then saying almost the completely opposite. Yeah? [indicates another S]
S: Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms
T: Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms. So, what he's saying is that everything seems out of shape but on the other hand the forms are well put together. One more example please.
S: Oh heavy lightness, serious vanity
T: Oh heavy lightness, serious vanity. So, something that seems heavy but is also light, Romeo seems to be saying [glances at watch]. We'll have to leave it there unfortunately because the bell is about to go. Don't lose these sheets because we'll need them on Monday. I need you to work out why Romeo is using so many oxymorons. What might that tell us about his state of mind at this particular part of the play?
[Ss start to pack away as the bell goes at the end of the lesson]

[Pa R&J p.20]

The teacher's cursory explanation of each contradiction (for example, heavy lightness defined as 'something that seems heavy but is also light') suggests that only one meaning exists. Pip repeats each student's short contribution to confirm its correctness, and uses what Edwards and Mercer (1987, p.130) call 'the royal we' to create a sense of collaborative enterprise and to mark off items that are to be considered of value. The feature spotting in this lesson has almost become an

end in itself, despite the promise that the oxymorons will shed light on Romeo's 'state of mind'.

Worksheets which demand matching names with character summaries also operate to suggest that literary works can be reduced to a set of facts. The worksheet (downloaded from an internet site) Pip uses to revise characters in the play before moving on to the coursework preparation, gives students no real option to reject certain readings of characters (although one student does baulk at the Nurse being described as 'rather stupid'). They are simply asked to take the given description and match each to a name. For example, the description of the Prince of Verona states uncompromisingly that he is: 'a wise and fair man. He is well liked and he tries to be a tough leader, but is caught between two warring families'. Likewise, the description of Juliet's father as: 'a stubborn old man who is used to getting his own way. He sometimes has a bad temper. He loves his daughter very much and wants the best for her' suggests that only one reading is possible. An obsession with 'facts' leads the compilers of these descriptions to ascribe ages to characters. Thus students are informed that Juliet's mother is 'about 30'; the nurse is 'a woman in her 40s'; Capulet is 'about 50'. During a later chart-filling exercise designed to directly support their essay writing, students are encouraged to transfer these potted character descriptions into the empty boxes, matched with an appropriate quotation from the focus scene. The point of these worksheets is not to prompt discussion or debate, but to 'get the facts straight' before moving inexorably on to the next phase of coursework preparation. In fact, the demands of the specific assessment regime appear to play a large part in constraining classroom approaches, even if the mode of assessment is coursework-based as was the case for GCSE at the time of the observation. I discuss this further in chapter 6.

4.1.3 Shakespeare fragmented

One effect of the use of photocopied extracts and worksheets is to fragment the play under study, so that individual parts become more important than the whole.

This is clearly exacerbated by the set scene approach of the SATs assessment regime, but it is also apparent even within the relative freedom of GCSE coursework assessment. Both Beth and Pip choose to focus the year 10 coursework essay on one or two scenes (the party scene in *Romeo and Juliet*; the Harfleur scenes in *Henry V*) and in this way impose a kind of set scene myopia onto GCSE. Although Marie's class largely completes classwork working directly from published copies of the play (the Cambridge Schools edition), the students in Beth's, Felicity's and Pip's classrooms do the majority of textual work from photocopied extracts. None of the classes, however, ever read more than half of the play as represented in their printed editions (and some read considerably less), and none of the students get to take a complete copy of the play home with them, apart from Pip's students who are offered the text to help with writing their coursework essay at the end of the series of lessons. When interviewed she comments that this was in the hope that the students might make use of the textual notes rather than to read the play itself. For students in Marie's, Pip's and Felicity's classes, they no longer deal with the overall play as an entity after the initial viewing of a film or video version – unless in the form of plot summaries as with the two year 9 SATs classes. Even right from the start of work on Macbeth, Felicity's class are aware that they will only need to work on fragments of text:

Sequence 4(10)

S: You know, in the test, will we actually have a copy of *Macbeth*?
T: Whoah. You're leaping ahead here. You'll have a copy of the scenes. We're only going to work on the scenes themselves (.) for a while.

[Pa Mac6, p.5]

The process of fragmentation works on a number of levels. Teachers break the play down, for example, into a list of 'themes' or' characters'. Within the set scene structure is a tendency to fragment it further by picking out 'key quotations' and then using these almost as a shorthand version of the scene. This is a process particularly noticeable in Marie's classroom where, as previously noted, these quotations get used as the basis for drama exercises and then the central focus for

logging notes on themes or characters.

With Pip, the students do not read any more of *Romeo and Juliet* in class beyond extracts from Act 1 scenes 1-4, before looking at Act 1, scene 5 in detail, the focal point for their essay. Students are entirely dependent on their viewing of the Luhrmann film for a sense of the whole play, yet Pip will strive to set up their essay writing so as to give the illusion for an examiner that the students have undertaken a close textual study of the printed text. Beth relies even more heavily than any of the other teachers on a film version of the play; in the five recorded lessons, Beth's students encounter only around a total of 200 lines of printed text, much less than even a single Act. Like Pip, Beth also sets an essay title which demands only a partial knowledge of the play - Henry's siege of Harfleur – focusing on three very short scenes from Act 3. It is a professional sleight of hand, previously identified by Kress et al (2005) that is probably executed by hundreds of GCSE English teachers every year.

When interviewed, the teachers' justification for fragmenting the plays in the ways discussed above tends to be for practical, assessment-oriented reasons. Both Marie and Felicity had at some time in the past attempted to read the whole play in class, but both had given that up. Marie says that this approach had tended to result in very teacher-led lessons:

> **Marie:** ...you get a sense of fulfilment from that, from reading it from the beginning to the end. It dominates the teaching and it makes it very teacher led because, because you are having to (.) because what you end up doing if you read it from the beginning to end is that you stop along the way and it's lovely, because you can really get into it and you can stop at bits that are interesting or the kids find interesting and you can talk about bits and discuss language, but it does mean that you haven't got time to do more focused activities and that's the problem for SAT preparation. Or for any outcome other than just an overview of the text and an understanding of the plot and some nice discussions along the way.

Felicity's reasons are more ambiguous:

> **Felicity:** Once upon a time I would have attempted to read the whole thing, but I've kind of given that up as a hopeless job, bearing in mind the nature of the SATs. I try to read up to, and beyond, the first set scene, because I think they've got to know the context, got to know what's happened before that. Then I tend to read the set scenes and we fill it in with either a video or a summary or some sort of story, but I don't actually slog through the whole play.

Both Pip and Marie make reference to time constraints, of having possibly only five weeks available in a busy programme of study to cover a Shakespeare play. A couple of Pip's newly qualified colleagues had read the whole play with their GCSE classes which she says they now regretted 'because a lot of it didn't really apply to the essay they'd written'. Beth comments that the set scene regime of SATs imposes its own teaching structure, with most teachers in her experience using a film version to sketch in the story, and then concentrating only on the set scenes. She says that in her department they try to avoid a purely instrumental approach:

> **Beth:** ...I know my department has argued against it and other people have argued against it or argued around it, how much you do. You know, in terms of SATs, there is such stress on the two scenes, and I think there is a very strong tendency in a lot schools, including ours, although probably less so than some, was to just go for the set scenes and get on with it. But I do always think it's important that they actually read other parts of the play, let's put it that way.

It is, perhaps, ironic that Beth stresses the educational importance of 'read[ing] other parts of the play', given that her year 10 class read so little of *Henry V*.

4.2 Textual Authority

The notion of textual authority is strongly marked in three out of the four classrooms under study. It is largely absent in Beth's class, probably because her students work with the printed text in very limited ways. Despite at least three of the four teachers clearly feeling committed to enabling students to interpret the

play for themselves, the majority of the lessons I recorded in both schools frequently position the students passively in the reading process and strongly suggest that there is ultimately an authoritative way of thinking about the play, one which students need to reproduce in their exam or coursework essays. Despite individual teachers' emphasis on drama activities, Shakespeare is constructed more often as textbook than as playtext. My observations of teachers working within curricular and assessment constraints provide a glimpse into just how difficult it is to avoid reproducing conventional, authoritative readings of Shakespeare's plays in the classroom.

4.2.1 Cultural reproduction: With the exception of Beth's treatment of *Henry V*, expressive realism is the major literary critical paradigm within which each play is constructed whether at key stage 3 or 4. Character is the predominant manifestation of this, where the world of the play is seen to be populated by real people who are imagined as having lives outside of the artistic confines of the playtext. Beth's discussion of Henry (discussed further in a later section) tends to conflate the historical figure with the fictional role, and rarely produces Henry as a conventional literary 'character'.

Within Felicity's classroom, justification for knowing the story of the play beyond the set scenes is summarised as 'to help you know the characters' (Pa, Mac6, p.5); how 'we' feel about the characters is a central concern of classroom discourse. Indeed whether we 'feel sympathy' for Macbeth as a person is the selected topic for the practice SATs essay discussed in the seventh lesson I observed:

Sequence 4(11)

T: To what extent (.) so, how far (.) hmm, how far do you feel sympathy and what (.) after the question, what does it tell you to do? Amina? Hmm? <u>After</u> the question, what does it tell you to do?
Amina: Support
T: Yes, that's (.) supporting what you're saying. Explain why you think that. Not just saying what you think. "I feel sympathy for Macbeth because". That's really

not a good enough answer. You've really got to develop the why. What there is in the play, not your reaction (3) necessarily. What there is in the text that tells you whether Shakespeare expects you to feel sympathy for Macbeth at this point in the play.

[Pa Mac7, p.6]

For these students 'character' is positioned to provide the key to understanding the play; our opinion of Macbeth is an objective truth that resides in 'the text', and according to Felicity here, should remain untainted by 'your reaction'. Bound up with character analysis are notions of authorial intention, to the extent that students are left second-guessing how Shakespeare expects us to react to these characters.

For Pip, studying *Romeo and Juliet* is all 'about understanding what these characters are feeling...and what they're saying to each other more generally' (Pa, R&J1, p.1). Thus, she retells the opening scene as if recounting real-life events from the perspective of real people. Her tone of voice when speaking in the following extract is chattily anecdotal:

Sequence 4(12)

T: [Romeo] says to Benvolio, he says, 'What fray was here?' He says, 'What's happened here?' because he can tell there's been a fight. Um, but Romeo is very much pre-occupied with his love, his infatuation with a certain Rosalind, that, er, who he loves but she doesn't love him back, so he's feeling very down, is Romeo, at this moment.

[Pa R&J1, p.19]

This approach is further exemplified in the way she leads discussion in preparation for the coursework essay. The use of the first person plural in the first line implies universal agreement for what's to follow:

Sequence 4(13)

T: OK, so we know [Juliet's] the daughter of Lord and Lady Capulet. Er, that's

our first clue obviously ... Um, so yes, she's a gentle girl, obedient to her parents, er but into the play, after she's met Romeo, what happens when things start to go quite wrong for her (2) er when does she change?
S: When they say she's going to get married to that man
T: Right, her father says she's going to get married to Paris so she becomes disobedient doesn't she? Capulet says 'young disobedient wretch, hang thee young baggage'. He gets very angry with her, doesn't he? Er, to begin with she's obedient but later on she sort of refuses, having fallen in love with Romeo she changes a little bit later on.

[Pa R&J2, p.4]

According to Pip, 'Capulet ...he seems not a bad bloke really', a type of commentary which takes attention away from the play's ideas and foregrounds individuals instead. In Pip's classroom, Capulet is less a theatrical role and more a person we might meet in our everyday lives.

Marie's take on character is often contradictory. For example, she initially talks of the witches as representational beings rather than asking her students to conceive of them as 'real'; she also sets up drama activities which subvert conventional literary notions of character, for instance, when she splits Macbeth into 'good Macbeth' and 'bad Macbeth' in a highly stylised way. Each of the two Macbeths has to 'perform' in front of the class, with the rest of the class taking on the role of director. Here is a moment where the 'good Macbeth' (played by Liz) is being given directorial advice initially by Meera:

Sequence 4(14)

T: OK, what would you do with Macbeth?
Meera: [inaudible]
T: Can you stand up, put her in the physical position that fits the words that she's just spoken.
Meera: [comes to the front of the classroom] Stand up, er kneel down [inaudible]
Liz: On my knees!
T: [smiles] Well, one direction at a time. Everyone to put hands up to direct in a minute.
S: [inaudible]
T: Who's she talking to?
Meera: The king.

S: [interrupting] she should be kneeling [T indicates to be quiet, and looks back at Meera]
T: She's talking to the king. OK, Liz? How, how should her body be if she's talking to the king?
Meera: On her knees.
T: OK, so can you get down on one knee or on two knees, please, Liz? [Liz kneels down]

[Ea Mac2, p.10]

This collaborative drama activity naturally develops in its subsequent stage to construct a notion of Macbeth's character as if a real person with real thoughts, as in this next extract. This comes from the point at which the class are suggesting ways to direct the 'bad Macbeth' (played by Ulesh). The teacher expertly orchestrates the drama activity, guiding her students as they work, drawing out their ideas without the direct form of discursive control apparent in previous sequences:

Sequence 4(15)

T: Yasmin, how do you think that bad Macbeth should be standing? How should he be delivering these lines?
Yasmin: Um, he should be, um (2)
T: Calvin's got an idea. Thank you for trying, Yasmin, we'll come back to you. (.) Calvin?
Calvin: [quietly] Like he doesn't care
T: [cups hand round her ear] Again?
Calvin: [louder] Like he doesn't care
T: Like he doesn't care. Does he, doesn't he care about what happens?
Ulesh: I DO care!
T: Why, what do you care about, Ulesh?
Ulesh: No-one finds out my desires.
T: So nobody finds out your desires. So, he wants to be (.)
Ulesh: A bit mysterious
T: A bit mysterious perhaps, a bit secretive…
Tunde: [interrupts. Unclear. Other Ss join in]
T: Er, hold on! I can't hear Tunde. Go on.
Tunde: A thinking face
T: A thinking face. Ok, can you do a thinking face for us, Ulesh? [Ulesh attempts a 'thinking face'].

[Ea Mac2, pp. 13-14]

This drama exercise appears to combine two opposing conceptions of character. On the one hand, a materialist notion of character as representative of conflicting ideas or themes; and on the other, the notion of real life people that comes from an expressive realist approach. Both of these positions are reflected in Marie's summing-up for the class:

> We're seeing two sides of Macbeth: the side he shows to the king (.) and to the public, which is his loyal and faithful side, and (.) um, what's going on inside...but this also represents one of the major themes of the play which is this dreadful conflict that goes on more in Macbeth than in his wife [Ea Mac2, p.18].

This offers a potentially rich, productive line of investigation. However, any scope for delving more deeply into what possibilities there are for interpreting character is immediately diminished by Marie's instruction for the students to take out their 'Macbeth factfiles', commercially produced pro-formas which require students to log Macbeth's age, marital status, address, names of friends and colleagues, then repeat this exercise for other main characters. The ensuing whole-class discussion is distinctly Bradleyan in flavour, buried within which are some highly insightful comments by individual students, which could offer productive starting points for discussion:

Sequence 4(17)

T: How old do people think Macbeth is? Ssh! Don't shout out. Let's just have a little think about it. How old do you think he was? We don't actually know. Sid?
Natalege: Thirty.
T: Why?
Natalege: He looked that age
T: What do you mean 'he looked that age'?
Natalege: In the film we watched.
T: But we're not basing this on the film, we're basing it on the play that we're reading.
Chris: He's old enough to have a rank in the army [unclear]
T: [nods] So he's worked his way up the ranks, hasn't he, you're right and he's been fighting for a while and he's got the respect of the king and others, well done. Umit, what did you think?

Umit: 28
T: You put 28: why?
Umit: er, same reasons.
T: [quelling a S who starts to interrupt] Please don't shout out. Annie, what did you think?
Annie: I put 27. He has fought quite a bit and got some respect but at the same time I don't think he's er (.) he's -
T: In his prime?
Annie: Yeah
T: Why, er, what makes you think that?
Annie: Because just the way he's still fighting, he's still trying to improve, and if he was quite old he really wouldn't be bothered
T: [interrupting, smiling] So people in their thirties are really quite old, are they?
Annie: [smiling] Yeah!
T: Right, so you're saying I'm old are you? [some laughter]
S: [unclear]
T: Good point, good point. A good argument. Liz?
Liz: I think he's about 30, because he still wants some achievement out of life, and he's still, like [unclear] and he hasn't got kids. If he was about 23 or 24 he'd [unclear]
T: Why do you say he hasn't got kids?
Liz: Coz lady Macbeth is loops.
T: She's what? Loops?
Liz: Crazy
T: Crazy. Ok, we'll come to that. It's an interesting idea. So most people have put between mid twenties and early thirties and good arguments justifying that. Marital status?

[Ea Mac2, pp.20-22]

The framing device of the character 'factfile' unfortunately serves to close down potential avenues of inquiry – for example, Chris and Annie's comments about Macbeth's role as a professional and ambitious soldier – which merely conclude with an estimation of Macbeth's age. These commercially produced fictive biographies or 'factfiles' echo the character worksheets used by Pip, discussed above; they have in common an obsession, for example, with ascribing precise ages to characters – presumably conceived as a way of inviting school students to 'identify' with Shakespearean *dramatis personae*, to visualise them as real people. They also share a curious tendency to attempt to pin down supposition as 'fact'.

Marie's dialogue with her students (sequence 4(17) above), raises another aspect of textual authority. The status of film and video versions of the plays is an uncertain one in these classrooms, as indicated by Marie's reminder about the primacy of the written text ('we're basing this on the play that we're reading'). Despite frequent references to film and television texts, moving image versions of specific plays are rarely if ever interrogated in their own terms. (I explore this further in section 4.3, below). Ultimately literary culture is tacitly afforded superior status in each of the classrooms under study. At its extreme manifestation, as indicated earlier, Felicity assumes a deficit cultural capacity in her students; although Pip begins the unit of work on *Romeo and Juliet* by making links with her students' existing cultural knowledge of popular cultural film, this is abandoned once the printed text itself is introduced. Beth's and Marie's students perhaps come closest to developing a synthesis of cultural forms as they draw on their cultural knowledge of popular cultural forms in their improvisations, role plays and other discussions. I will explore this in more detail in the later section dealing with 'multi-accentual' Shakespeare (section 4.5 below).

Because the focus of study ultimately remains the literary text in these classrooms (as is demanded by the English Literature curriculum and the assessment system in operation at the time of the research) the notion of 'audience' tends to be constructed by teachers as an abstract concept, hovering somewhere between an idealised theatre-goer and solitary reader. So, for instance, when discussing Macbeth's dealings with the murderers (Ea Mac6), Marie talks about 'the effect on the audience', 'the impact on the audience' and asks her class to guess the 'audience's response'. Pip also conceives of an idealised audience which responds in a homogeneous way to events – a kind of virtual everyman and woman. Pip talks of how 'this is made exciting for us as an audience'; at another point she comments: '...it's really the audience that have a sense of foreboding. They leave Act one scene 5 thinking, 'Oh my God, what's going to happen now?'.

When preparing her students for their GCSE essay, she urges them to make reference to 'the audience' and what the audience 'might expect' from certain events. Beth's concept of audience is influenced by her focus on the film version (for example, 'we...as viewers', HV1, p.2), but, in response to GCSE assessment criteria, like Pip she also directs her students to take a quasi-historical view of audience at the point of writing the coursework essay: 'One thing you might want to think about is the fact that a modern audience would see these things differently from Shakespeare's audience, yeah?' (HV5, p.5).

Despite moments where all four teachers encourage students to engage dialogically with the words and ideas of the play, teachers' inclination is to reproduce authoritative readings in the classroom and to construct a right answer approach, which usually places the students in a passive relationship with the playtext. As already indicated, teachers' frequent use of first person plural pronouns underscores the notion that these readings are 'natural', universally shared, what Edwards and Mercer (1987, p.130) term 'joint knowledge markers'. For instance, Pip asks her class to consider what 'we' make of the characters as the class watch part of the Baz Luhrmann film (Pa R&J1, p.10); Felicity aims that 'we' will all have 'a general understanding of the play' (Pa Mac6, p.1); Marie prompts her class to remember what 'we' agreed 'that tells us about Macbeth' (Ea Mac2, p.24). Incidences of this kind of authoritative teacher-student interaction are numerous, and can be located in most of the lessons I observed. Typical of this way of working, is Marie's whole-class exploration of the opening scene of *Macbeth* during the closing ten minutes of the lesson. Having commenced the lesson with improvisatory work around themes, she proceeds to nudge her students into a particular interpretation of the first scene through a series of cued elicitations (Edwards and Mercer, 1987):

Sequence 4(18)

T: [standing at front of class] Well done. If you had to turn the rhythm of what you've just heard into a hand-clap, how would it go? [a couple of students start to try] Er, one at a time. Annie, you go.

[Annie has a go, but stops].
T: Everyone, just a minute, have a go. Come on. [Ss clapping at various speeds]. OK, and stop. Right, who wants to have a go at clapping out that rhythm? (.) Calvin, have a go.
[Calvin claps]
T: Absolutely fantastic. So it goes [T claps and reads out 'when shall we three meet again…'] Can anyone say what that might remind them of?
Ss: [various suggestions – unclear]
Sue: Jack and Jill went up the hill…
T: [emphasises the rhythm] 'Jack and Jill went up the hill'. Mmm. Ok. I'll give you a clue. [noise builds up: Ss are getting restless] . I'll give you a clue. It's got something to do with the most natural thing we know (.) something to do with our bodies, something to do with our bodies. Meera?
Meera: Heartbeat.
Tr: Heartbeat. Right. Can you clap out the rhythm of the heart for me? [Lots of Ss clap. T nods] Listen. [T points at Liz] Ssh. Ssh. Listen (.) Do the heartbeat. Do the heartbeat. Listen. [Liz claps] Where's the stress, where's the stress? Is it on the first or the second beat?
Ss: [several call out]
T: Ssh. Ssh. So the heartbeat, with the heartbeat, the stress falls on the second beat [T claps to illustrate]. Where does the stress fall of this (.) of this scene?
Liz: The second. 'When SHALL we..'
T: Does it?
Liz: Oh the first.
T: Yes. WHEN shall WE three MEET aGAIN. (.) So it reminds you of a heartbeat [some Ss are still clapping] Ssh. Ssh. So it reminds us of a heartbeat, but is it exactly the same as a heartbeat? Chris?
Chris: No.
T: No, OK. Thinking about themes again (.) thinking about themes again who's in this scene and what do you think is the main theme of this scene. What does it set us up for? [a few hands go up. T points across the room].
Joe: It's like (.) it's like (.) not real, like
T: [prompting] It's not real, not (.)
Joe: It's not natural, not natural. It's supernatural.
T: So the witches represent, symbolise the supernatural in the play (.) and the fact that it's not a real heartbeat (.) coz it's different to a heartbeat, it is anti-nature (.) OK, so that's the first [unclear], the main themes of the play that we have.

[Ea Mac1]

The nature of Marie's questioning indicates a tension between a desire for the students to engage in explorative activity for themselves ('have a go'; 'can anyone

say what that might remind them of?') and the necessity to work within tight time constraints, resulting in the teacher's verbal manipulation of students towards the desired reading of the text, one which conveniently leads to a confirmation of the thematic way in which the lesson opened (the 'supernatural' was one of the themes selected by Marie for a group improvisation). At a purely linguistic level, the initial questions appear to be open and inviting exploration; discursively, what is revealed here is a traditional guessing game played out by the teacher so that the students arrive at the exact answers she is looking for. Moreover, what Marie is offering is a selective and partial reading of the text. For example, the sheer theatricality of the opening scene, both visually and aurally, is not taken up. The text remains very much printed words on a page. Reducing it to 'the supernatural' places interpretation in the field of metaphysics, laying the ground for a conventional – but increasingly contested - reading of the play which might go on to present Macbeth as a tragic hero, a rogue individual falling under the influence of devilish powers. But the witches are not operating in a social and political vacuum, as their reference to 'battle' makes clear. And with England in Shakespeare's lifetime being almost permanently at war (Shapiro, 2005, Rosen, 2004) such references must surely have carried contemporary resonance. Since alternative responses to this opening scene are not invited from the students, the end of this first lesson probably suggests for the students that there is one correct reading of the text, and it is going to be the teacher's role to reveal it. Once preparation for the SATs test gets more overtly underway, further into the series of lessons, students are not only expected to listen to the teacher's interpretation, but also to note it down, as happens in this extract from Marie's penultimate lesson of the unit:

Sequence 4(19)

T: How do you think we feel about Macbeth?
Chris: Bathos
T: Bathos! Can you explain what that means?
Chris: Guilty, but…
S: [interrupts] kind of…
Ss: [two Ss speak at once. Unclear]

T: OK [writes on the white board] 'uses bathos' (.) OK (.) 'which is where you see how pitiful Macbeth is (.) but can't feel (.) sorry (.) for him' (.). OK. Everybody got that? [Ss write this down on their grids]

[Ea Mac6, p.20]

The balance in Felicity's lessons is even more weighted towards passive acceptance of the teacher's interpretation of the play. Pedagogically, Felicity's approach is typically to use whole-class question and answer sessions to shape students' interpretation of the play, as exemplified in sequence 4(43), discussed below.

Unlike Marie's class, Felicity's students are not required to take many notes for themselves (indeed, in interview she suggests that her students do not have the necessary skills. She states that these middle set students 'don't know what they're supposed to be writing down, which makes the whole thing pointless'); instead they are provided with sets of photocopied notes (from Roma Gill's edition of the play) which reproduce dominant readings of the play. Once again, these often focus on conventional notions of character, for example, that Macbeth exhibits 'uncontrolled ambition' which tragically destroys a man otherwise 'noble in nature' (Gill 1977, p.x). The play according to these notes, works on four levels: 'entertainment, moral teaching, psychology and the poetry' (p.x). Felicity does not offer her students the possibility of reading the play in any other way.

Pip not only uses closed question and answer sessions, but also worksheets, grids and a detailed writing frame to construct a reading of *Romeo and Juliet* for her students. In the following example she constructs a conventional reading of the play, one which is embedded within whole-class dialogue tightly controlled by the teacher:

Sequence 4(20)

T: ...So the Prologue tells us: "From ancient grudge break to new mutiny" which

(.) which means it's a grudge that's been going on for a long time, the families haven't got on for a long time, and the new mutiny is when it's started up again and it's, in Act 1 scene i last week we saw the servants - it's the characters who aren't all that important really, they start off the problem again, and then it comes, it involves Tybalt, Benvolio and then Romeo later on gets involved as well, doesn't he? Um that's why it's a grudge that's been going on - er but it's interesting isn't it, as Meera said, we never find out what they first fell out over. Um it could have been an argument over property, we did that discussion didn't we, where we thought about the potential things that they might have fallen out about, er, so, there are a number of reasons but why, why don't we need to have the reason why they've fallen out? (3) Possibly (2) Do we need to know what the reason is?
Ben: No
S: Not really
Meera: No it's mainly around Romeo
T: Right, the focus of the play is on Romeo and Juliet. They are in the title. It doesn't really alter the story what they'd fallen out about. The thing that matters is that they had argued about something.

[Pa R&J2, p.5]

Here Pip is constructing the play solely as a love story (albeit set within inexplicably warring families). It is worth analysing the discursive structures at work in a little more detail here in the way that the teacher tacitly co-opts agreement from her students. First person plural pronouns, tag questions ('isn't it', 'didn't we') and the way Pip weaves previous student contributions into the fabric of her talk ('as Meera said') all operate to create a sense of collaborative construction of knowledge. Explicit continuity with previous lessons ('last week we saw'; 'we did that discussion didn't we') contribute to this process. The sequence ends with firm, definitive statements from Pip, both the language and her intonation inviting no further discussion.

In another of Pip's lessons, language is mined purely for examples which support this domesticated view of the play, when a list of oxymorons is used to reveal something about Romeo's psychological make-up, as previously discussed (see sequence 4(9) above). In a later lesson when Pip is going through the essay plan,

she asks for an example of the way Shakespeare 'uses linguistic devices to create meaning':

Sequence 4(21)

T: Right. Analyse Shakespeare's use of linguistic devices. What do we understand that to mean?
Shameela: Er, the way he writes things, and the way he, er, yeah, yeah
S: His expression
Shameela: Er, yeah
T: His expression, the way he writes things
Ben: Yeah, like for example, when he's speaking about Juliet, the use of the words
T: Right, excellent, we talked about that example didn't we, similar to this one really in a few ways, is again looking closely at the language, at how does Shakespeare use these linguistic devices, to create the meaning. Ben's example was a good one. Romeo uses very soft O sounds when he's talking about Juliet which makes him speak very smoothly and very softly. That's the analysis, if you're just going to read on the surface and not between the lines then you'd say, 'Romeo falls in love with Juliet at first sight and he says this, he says, "She doth teach the torches to burn bright"' (.) Your analysis comes when you say, 'Romeo uses soft O sounds, which emphasises his feelings of love'. That's when you take it to the next level.

[Pa R&J, pp.9-10]

Students do not have the opportunity to discover literary or linguistic devices for themselves. They are vaguely aware that 'words' and 'expressions' from the plays are important, but as I discuss in Chapter 5, a nagging concern to include quotations in essays as part of a formulaic essay structure (with varying degrees of relevance or understanding) is a common feature across many of the students' written work. In the same instructional way that Pip drew attention to oxymorons in Romeo's language, here again she defines the term, and provides an example – but how meaningful or illuminating these examples are for students is not discussed. They are purely offered as a point to reproduce in an essay. Interestingly, when interviewed, Pip comments:

> 'You have to find the balance between saying this means this and just telling them and translating what it all means, which is just very dry, very boring'

On reflection she suggests that her approach has perhaps been too prescriptive and even feels that this might have prevented some students from attaining higher grades in their essay: 'their originality was stunted'.

Because Beth's way of working is least closely tied to the printed playtext, and because she sets an essay title which is limited to a thematic analysis of three enclosed scenes, conventional character analysis and feature-spotting figure very rarely in her lessons. In the majority of the lessons, she is at pains to invite students to imagine what dramatic 'characters' in the film might say, to predict outcomes of situations or to consider the political significance of alliances between church and state. Nevertheless, by the end of the sequence of lessons, her students are ultimately positioned so as to be totally reliant on their teacher to mediate the play for them at the point of assessment. Beth's essay support sheets provide students with a detailed essay plan, photocopied scenes (taken from the Cambridge Schools edition) with quotations already marked by the teacher alongside handwritten marginal notes:

Sequence 4(22)

T: The front sheet – it's all double-sided – the front sheet gives you a plan and outline of the sort of thing you should be writing about. OK, and I'll go through that quickly in a second. And then secondly attached to it is a photocopy with the notes of the scenes that you're writing about –
S: So what do we do in section 1?
T: Hang on, hang on, I'm telling you about it. OK, if you look (.) if you look at the actual scenes, turn over to the second page, and the first bit you've got is where it says 'Act 3, Scene 1, France, outside the walls of Harfleur'. Yep? OK? I've underlined some things on it to help you find quotes, OK? There are some notes on the side which tell you about the words, OK? So, I've given you some help by doing some underlining, and given you some notes, we've looked at that speech before –
Derya: Miss, what's that bit?
T: [looks across] What bit? [S gestures on the sheet] That's the continuation of the essay. We'll look at that in a sec, OK. If you then turn over (2) ssh, if you then turn over, it goes into the bit in which Bardolph, Nym and Henry's old friends run away which is not written as poetry, it's written as prose. We'll talk about why in a second, OK? ... the notes on the side have been copied from the book. Some are directions to teachers on how to teach it, but I've left them in because it does

> give you some clues as to how to read it, yeah? OK, so, all you're writing about is 3 scenes ... Now look at the top of the page, obviously, the front page, please. OK, the title at the top of the front page, and in the box, some advice about coursework. First of all [reads from sheet] 'to write about this coursework you will need to write about 3 scenes. Henry's once more unto the breach, Bardolph and Henry's old friends, then the scene in front of Harfleur with Henry threatening the Governor of Harfleur'. In other words what we've just watched (3) Yep? Secondly, remember to use your quotations, remember to actually give your points, give your evidence, your explanations, talk about the language. OK? (2) Ssh, ssh. Same as in any other essay. Thirdly, focus on the question, and in the last part I've reminded you that Shakespeare wrote this play in 1599 (.) ... And I've just reminded you that Henry was a hero figure. What we talked about last lesson that some things Shakespeare uses are fact, some are definitely completely invented and some things he changes and twists, yeah? For example, historically the English soldiers did take the town of Harfleur, and they did burn, and rape and murder and do terrible things, whereas in the play it's shown differently, isn't it? I've just mentioned that there. So basically the plan, is straightforward. Introduction [looks down and reads] Explain what you are writing about, essentially you're looking at what happens – right!
>
> [Ea HV5, pp.3-4]

In interview, Beth expresses her deep dissatisfaction with the current assessment system which assesses understanding of a dramatic text solely through a written response, reducing a Shakespeare play to an 'exam text'. Her anxiety appears to surface in the transcript above with the repeated use of 'OK' (particularly when uttered with rising intonation) or 'yep/yeah?'. Phrases, such as 'same as in any other essay'; 'some clues'; 'help you'; 'straightforward'; 'basically', cumulatively emphasise the apparent straightforward nature of the task – although the level of support offered appears to contradict this, an issue which I pick up in a later section.

Notions of authorial intention do not play a significant part in the majority of the classroom dialogue under study. Given the prevalence of Shakespeare's apparent intentions in school examination questions (as discussed in Chapter 2), I found this to be a surprising aspect of the classroom data. Although teachers reproduce dominant readings of the plays, it is only Felicity who directly attributes these to Shakespeare's conscious artistic purpose (as in an example cited earlier).

However, for Pip the concept of authorial intention emerges in worksheets, designed to support essay preparation, as for instance in the 'Thinking about Act 1 scene 5' sheet which repeatedly asks students to explain why Shakespeare includes specific incidents or employs particular linguistic features.

4.2.2 Shakespeare as textbook

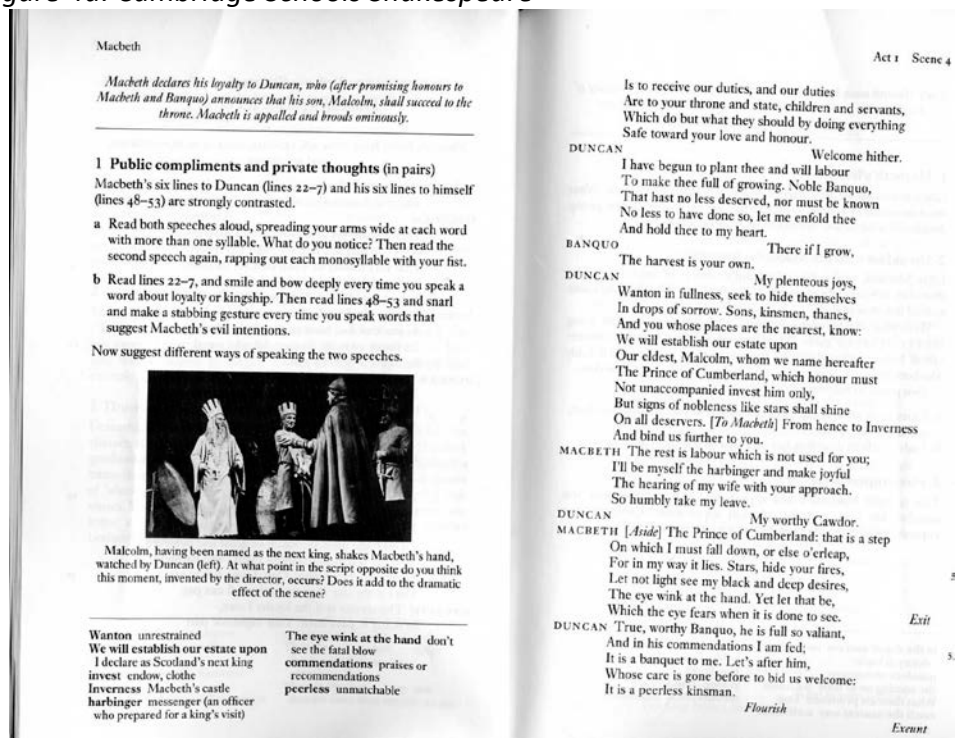
> 'The literary texts that are brought into the curriculum constitute the cultural, social and ethical material with which the teacher and the students will need to engage, and they come to form one important element of what English can come to mean...What texts enter the classroom and what is done to and with them is therefore a political decision…' (Kress et al., 2005, p. 141)

Use of the school editions: Not only is the actual selection of what literary texts to take into the classroom a 'political' decision (where space allows it in the National Curriculum), but when it comes to Shakespeare I would argue that the precise form the text (print and moving image) takes, is significant. As already indicated, two different print editions are used in the two schools, perhaps reflecting the departments' respective philosophies (see Appendix L). Although none of the teachers I observed read the whole text of the specific play with their classes (or, indeed, expected their students to read it at home), all four teachers did present students with complete texts at some point of the textual study. The Eastgate English department use the Cambridge School Shakespeare editions (CSS), whereas Parkside teachers use the Oxford schools editions. As revealed by later interviews, the choice of edition in each case had been a departmental decision. On an individual level, Marie, Beth and Pip express a preference for the CSS editions; only Felicity prefers the Oxford Schools edition.

a) Cambridge School Shakespeare (Gibson, 1993b) : arising out of Gibson's Shakespeare in Schools project, this series takes as its premise that Shakespeare should be approached first and foremost as practical drama; the series editor, Rex

Gibson's mantra when leading INSET for teachers, was that 'this is a script, not a text'. Consequently, the CSS editions have minimal introductory information and are organised with script on the right-hand pages and ideas for classroom activities on the left-hand pages. The editions are illustrated with production photographs, some of which are included in enquiry-based activities themselves (see illustration below). Additional activities and graphics appear between acts. The activities include drama-based approaches to the play, some of which arise out of rehearsal techniques. Some of the activities focus on character or language and encourage a close reading of the text, often using a 'modern analogy' approach; some activities promote an understanding of the importance of social and historical context. Most of them envisage collaborative work in the classroom. Explanatory notes and glossaries are kept to a minimum in this series, the idea being that the more students are actively involved, the less they need to rely on an editor's interpretation.

Figure 4a: Cambridge Schools Shakespeare



Macbeth

Macbeth declares his loyalty to Duncan, who (after promising honours to Macbeth and Banquo) announces that his son, Malcolm, shall succeed to the throne. Macbeth is appalled and broods ominously.

1 Public compliments and private thoughts (in pairs)

Macbeth's six lines to Duncan (lines 22–7) and his six lines to himself (lines 48–53) are strongly contrasted.

a Read both speeches aloud, spreading your arms wide at each word with more than one syllable. What do you notice? Then read the second speech again, rapping out each monosyllable with your fist.

b Read lines 22–7, and smile and bow deeply every time you speak a word about loyalty or kingship. Then read lines 48–53 and snarl and make a stabbing gesture every time you speak words that suggest Macbeth's evil intentions.

Now suggest different ways of speaking the two speeches.

Malcolm, having been named as the next king, shakes Macbeth's hand, watched by Duncan (left). At what point in the script opposite do you think this moment, invented by the director, occurs? Does it add to the dramatic effect of the scene?

Wanton unrestrained
We will establish our estate upon I declare as Scotland's next king
invest endow, clothe
Inverness Macbeth's castle
harbinger messenger (an officer who prepared for a king's visit)
The eye wink at the hand don't see the fatal blow
commendations praises or recommendations
peerless unmatchable

Act 1 Scene 4

Is to receive our duties, and our duties
Are to your throne and state, children and servants,
Which do but what they should by doing everything
Safe toward your love and honour.

DUNCAN Welcome hither.
I have begun to plant thee and will labour
To make thee full of growing. Noble Banquo,
That hast no less deserved, nor must be known
No less to have done so, let me enfold thee
And hold thee to my heart.

BANQUO There if I grow,
The harvest is your own.

DUNCAN My plenteous joys,
Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves
In drops of sorrow. Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know:
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland, which honour must
Not unaccompanied invest him only,
But signs of nobleness like stars shall shine
On all deservers. [*To Macbeth*] From hence to Inverness
And bind us further to you.

MACBETH The rest is labour which is not used for you;
I'll be myself the harbinger and make joyful
The hearing of my wife with your approach.
So humbly take my leave.

DUNCAN My worthy Cawdor.

MACBETH [*Aside*] The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires,
The eye wink at the hand. Yet let that be,
Which the eye fears when it is done to see. *Exit*

DUNCAN True, worthy Banquo, he is full so valiant,
And in his commendations I am fed;
It is a banquet to me. Let's after him,
Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome:
It is a peerless kinsman.

Flourish

Exeunt

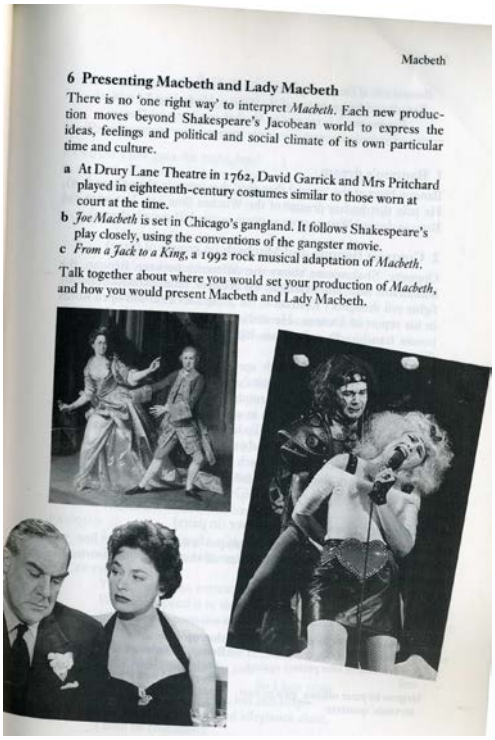
Rex Gibson's brief Introduction to each of the plays encourages students and teachers to 'bring the play to life in your classroom' and to remember that 'Shakespeare wrote his plays to be acted, watched and enjoyed'. Key words are

'exploring' and 'experimenting'. In direct contrast to Roma Gill's introductory comments, he invites students to interpret the play for themselves:

> actors have created their different interpretations of the play over the centuries. Similarly you are encouraged to make up your own mind about Macbeth, rather than have someone else's interpretation handed down to you.

The sections at the end of Gibson's edition of *Macbeth* start with 'Looking back at the whole play', which includes a 'Point of View' task, where students are asked to consider different readings of Macbeth (eg Marxist, psychoanalytical, feminist etc) and to apply one to a sample scene. Other pages are devoted to activity-based explorations of alternative 'meanings' or productions of the play (see illustration below), the action of Macbeth, witches and witchcraft, language, staging, themes, imagery and history.

Figure 4b: activity pages from the Cambridge Schools Shakespeare



Macbeth

6 Presenting Macbeth and Lady Macbeth

There is no 'one right way' to interpret *Macbeth*. Each new production moves beyond Shakespeare's Jacobean world to express the ideas, feelings and political and social climate of its own particular time and culture.

a At Drury Lane Theatre in 1762, David Garrick and Mrs Pritchard played in eighteenth-century costumes similar to those worn at court at the time.
b *Joe Macbeth* is set in Chicago's gangland. It follows Shakespeare's play closely, using the conventions of the gangster movie.
c *From a Jack to a King*, a 1992 rock musical adaptation of *Macbeth*.

Talk together about where you would set your production of *Macbeth*, and how you would present Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Activities are sometimes contradictory. For example, at one point Gibson draws parallels with modern dictators (eg Stalin and Hitler, p.92) operating in a totalitarian state. Elsewhere, however, improvisations and role plays generally construct character in the expressive realist tradition, as for instance, prompts to

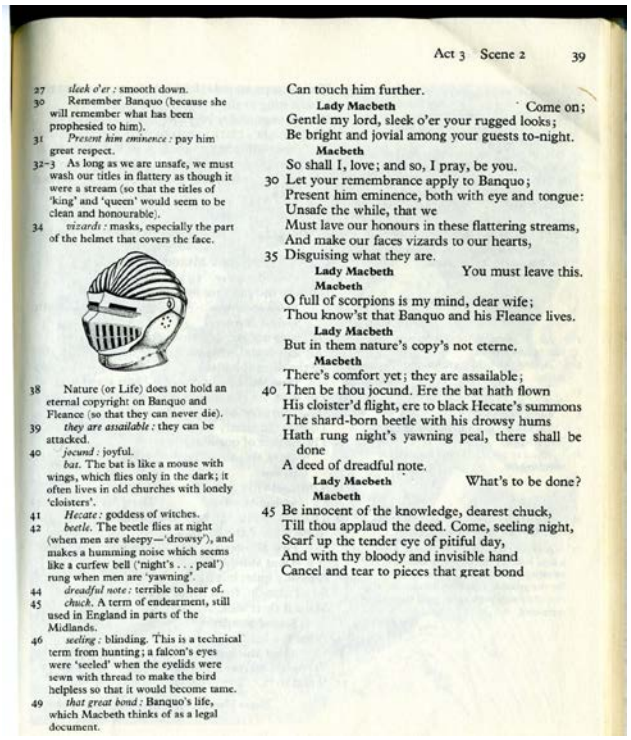
guess what a character is thinking at a particular moment in the play (eg activity 1, p.122). Gibson never extends an invitation for students to deconstruct the cultural icon that is 'Shakespeare' – activities are resolutely focused on individual plays. Furthermore, the relationship between the activities and the text is not straightforward in the Cambridge edition. When Beth photocopies three scenes from the CUP edition of *Henry V* to support the coursework essay, students are confused by the inclusion of the left-hand pages of activities and notes:

> ***Sequence 4(23)***
>
> **Grace:** [Interrupts] Miss, what's this?
> **T:** [T leans over to look] OK, the notes on the side have been copied from the book. Some are directions to teachers on how to teach it, but I've left them in because it does give you some clues as to how to read it, yeah?
>
> [Ea HV5, p.3]

b) Oxford School Shakespeare (Gill, 1977)**:** this has the appearance of a conventional textbook. There are 27 pages of introductory material (including scene by scene plot summary and character notes) before the actual playtext starts. Layout consists of the script sharing almost half of all page space with detailed explanatory notes and glosses. These notes therefore assume almost as much prominence as the script itself. Illustrations are exclusively line drawings 'of an old-fashioned style' (Fairhall, 2006, p.51) and these often serve to illuminate a note or a gloss (see figure 3). Including the ringing endorsement that, 'Shakespeare's plays make the best "set texts"' (p.v), Roma Gill's introduction asks that students enjoy the play: 'I like it, and I want you to share my enjoyment' (p.iii; original emphasis). There is no sense that readers are constituted differently; the assumption appears to be that literature is ideologically neutral and that students' varied class/cultural backgrounds allow them different but equal access to literary texts – and that we will then all share the same literary taste. Gill suggests that acting it out will help students understand the play, but the majority of the Introduction serves to treat the play as a literary text. She insists that 'Shakespeare wrote the best poetry' (p.iv); she develops a Jonsonian

line of argument: 'The characters that Shakespeare has created, and the feelings he has described, are alive in <u>our</u> world….there are many wives who are ambitious for their husband's success (and their own social positions)!' (p.v)

Figure 4c: Oxford Schools edition



Act 3 Scene 2 39

27 *sleek o'er :* smooth down.
30 Remember Banquo (because she will remember what has been prophesied to him).
31 *Present him eminence :* pay him great respect.
32–3 As long as we are unsafe, we must wash our titles in flattery as though it were a stream (so that the titles of 'king' and 'queen' would seem to be clean and honourable).
34 *vizards :* masks, especially the part of the helmet that covers the face.

38 Nature (or Life) does not hold an eternal copyright on Banquo and Fleance (so that they can never die).
39 *they are assailable :* they can be attacked.
40 *jocund :* joyful.
bat. The bat is like a mouse with wings, which flies only in the dark; it often lives in old churches with lonely 'cloisters'.
41 *Hecate :* goddess of witches.
42 *beetle.* The beetle flies at night (when men are sleepy—'drowsy'), and makes a humming noise which seems like a curfew bell ('night's . . . peal') rung when men are 'yawning'.
44 *dreadful note :* terrible to hear of.
45 *chuck.* A term of endearment, still used in England in parts of the Midlands.
46 *seeling :* blinding. This is a technical term from hunting; a falcon's eyes were 'seeled' when the eyelids were sewn with thread to make the bird helpless so that it would become tame.
49 *that great bond :* Banquo's life, which Macbeth thinks of as a legal document.

Can touch him further.
Lady Macbeth Come on;
Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks;
Be bright and jovial among your guests to-night.
Macbeth
So shall I, love; and so, I pray, be you.
30 Let your remembrance apply to Banquo;
Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue:
Unsafe the while, that we
Must lave our honours in these flattering streams,
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
35 Disguising what they are.
Lady Macbeth You must leave this.
Macbeth
O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife;
Thou know'st that Banquo and his Fleance lives.
Lady Macbeth
But in them nature's copy's not eterne.
Macbeth
There's comfort yet; they are assailable;
40 Then be thou jocund. Ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
The shard-born beetle with his drowsy hums
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note.
Lady Macbeth What's to be done?
Macbeth
45 Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond

The character notes isolate characters from their social contexts, and make unequivocally moralistic claims about the dramatis personae, such as 'Duncan is a true and gracious king...' (p. xi), imposing a particular reading and a particular set of values. According to Gill, 'Macbeth "catches" evil as one might catch a disease…' (p.xxiv), a far cry from Eagleton's provocative reading where he proposes the three witches as the real heroines of the piece, who reveal Macbeth's 'reverence for hierarchical social order' based on 'routine oppression and incessant warfare' (Eagleton, 1986 p.2). In keeping with its traditional textbook structure, a collection of sample exam questions comes at the end of the edition. Theoretically Gill's edition is easier to pin down than Gibson's. She reproduces hegemonic readings based on assumptions of expressive realism, thereby presenting readers with an individualised portrayal of characters, which

has the effect of depoliticising the play; in seeking the association between Shakespeare and everyday life, she adopts the view that Shakespeare illuminates universal values.

My guess is that most students would never independently read the introduction, but teachers may be influenced by it. Felicity reads through the whole of the character notes with her year 9 class before reading the first scene, and she photocopies some of the other notes for students to take away, emphasising the play as an object of study right from the start. When Felicity eventually turns to the opening scene itself with the words, 'We're going to see what we're going to find out' she momentarily diverts attention from the text to the preceding full list of characters, plot synopsis and commentary. Immediately the class commence reading the scene, she asks for a definition of a 'heath' and waits for a student to hazard a guess before pointing out that the definition is provided by the editor (see Sequence 4(2) above). *Macbeth* is here constructed precisely as a textbook, the authorised version complete with necessary translations and pseudo-scholarly explanations. Felicity's practice exemplifies her comments in interview: she explains her preference for the Oxford Schools edition by reference to the 'notes at the side' and because the 'printing's nice and clear...easy to photocopy'. In contrast, Beth suggests that the 'visually attractive' CSS editions with pictures of different theatre productions crucially 'relate to Shakespeare as drama rather than as a text to be analysed'. Both Marie and Beth comment favourably on the running plot summaries and the left-hand page interactive teaching ideas; as Marie says, 'You could do a whole scheme of work out of those books'. Beth also suggests that the ideas are supportive of English teachers not trained in drama, a reflection of her own position and practice.

4.3 Shakespeare constructed as drama

In interview all four teachers strongly assert the importance of constructing a

Shakespeare play as drama, a script to be performed. Marie states that it is 'vital' that students see the play performed; Felicity says that 'drama is crucial' as an approach in the classroom; Pip highlights a couple of lessons where she used drama as being particularly successful at bringing the text alive; Beth talks enthusiastically about a Rex Gibson/RSC workshop she had attended a few years previously. Not surprisingly, therefore, all four teachers in my study construct Shakespeare as drama to a greater or lesser extent in the classroom, the most obvious way being through the employment of 'active methods'. For the purposes of this analysis, however, my definition of drama is not confined to practical Gibson style acting/directing exercises or visits to the theatre, but may be signified by everyday acts of the English classroom such as apportioning parts and reading aloud, drawing attention to theatrical conventions or theatrical history, employing drama language, and watching performances on film.

4.3.1 Professional performances of the specific playtext: By the time they came to study the play in class, year 9 classes at both Eastgate and Parkside had already seen separate Theatre in Education (TIE) travelling productions of *Macbeth* which each school presumably funded as part of SATs preparation for the whole of the year group. Such TIE performances typically offer an overview of individual SATs plays, perhaps an edited version of the play, focusing on set scenes, sometimes followed by workshop activities. Neither Year 10 group in my study was offered the opportunity to see a stage production of their selected GCSE playtext. That this appears to reflect national patterns of classroom practice is suggested by anecdotal evidence reported in the education press that some TIE companies were predicted to lose up to 80% of their schools business once the year 9 SATs were scrapped (Mansell, 2008). Nevertheless, given the investment made by each school in securing a TIE company, and the importance claimed by all four teachers in seeing a production, it is remarkable that neither of the two year 9 teachers capitalized on this shared experience during the lessons I observed. Indeed, I was unaware that Felicity's class had seen a production until the end of the unit of work when she showed me a sample of written evaluations completed by her students in the previous term (in conversation with me, Felicity criticised the TIE

performance for not covering the whole plot, merely offering 'a sense of the drama', a comment which reveals the functional nature of her view of film or theatre performances in the context of education). Marie, for whom active drama is a key component of her teaching, only once makes direct reference to the live performance seen by all the year 9 students to support work on directing a set scene:

Sequence 4(24)

T: ... Do you remember when we saw the performance in the theatre, how did the actors, the two actors playing the murderers, how did they behave? How did they characterise those parts? [Pauses, looks round the room. 2 or 3 hands go up] How did they behave? Who can remember? (4)
Tunde: Shaking, scared
T: Shaking and scared. Kwame, what do you say?
Kwame: They came across a bit stupid
T: Yes, they came across a bit stupid, didn't they?
Kwame: [puts on a 'stupid' voice] Yeah, dey spoke like dis
T: Yes, they were a bit dopey. [Ss murmur, laughter] Yes, a bit thick, to be honest, weren't they? They were shown to be not very clever (.) so, (.) Macbeth is persuading the murderers why they should do this job (2) Remember I said at the beginning of the lesson we would be doing some quote-finding (.) Folks [turns to readers] thanks very much. You can go back to your tables now. [Ss get up and move back to seats] .

[Ea Mac3, p.5]

However, Marie is unique amongst the teachers in my study for making a number of references to actual theatre performances she has seen herself, as in the following example taken from the sixth lesson I observed:

Sequence 4(25)

T: Fantastic, so you could write that in that box and you'd explain when and where that happens. And finally, and this is the whole directorial thing, and the effect on the audience, and do you remember when I told you about when (.) I went to see the play the other night and several times the audience was clearly very affected because they made noises when the murderers kill Macduff's children. I couldn't look, but I heard the audience take that sharp intake of breath as the murderer stabbed the knife into the little boy's throat [T gives dramatic intake of breath]. I heard the audience do that. So think about the impact of what goes on in the scene, the impact it has on the audience as things unfold on stage.

Marie's down-to-earth way of talking about theatre-going assumes that there is nothing unusual about this as a cultural activity (although student questionnaires reveal that two-thirds of this class claim never to have seen a Shakespeare play on stage before; see Appendix M).

Film/video affords students the opportunity to see a complete production of the play under study, a practice common to the majority of Key Stage 3 and 4 English classrooms, as indicated by teacher surveys published over the past ten years (Batho, 1998, Stibbs, 1998, Martindale, 2008). However, there is little empirical evidence about the use to which these moving image versions are commonly put. What surprised me was that despite having access to a number of alternative productions of each play, all four teachers in my research largely stick to a single version for use with their class. Marie shows Polanski's *Macbeth* (1971); Felicity uses the 1978 RSC version of *Macbeth* (dir. Trevor Nunn); Beth shows Kenneth Branagh's 1989 film of *Henry V;* and Pip's class watch Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film, *Romeo + Juliet.* In contrast to practice described in research elsewhere (for example, see Hodgen and Marshall, 2005), in the lessons I observed none of the teachers make comparisons across available alternatives, even to look at how key scenes have been interpreted by different directors; none borrow techniques deriving from media studies to help interrogate the film or video text. In effect, Marie, Felicity and Pip show the film/video version in a fairly concentrated unedited block, spanning two or three lessons with little or no accompanying discussion. Marie's class watch the whole of *Macbeth* while she is absent during two cover lessons before beginning the unit of work on the play. Felicity's class watch the video of *Macbeth* once they have begun to read the opening scenes of the play, and after some preliminary work on Shakespeare's life and times. Pip reads the opening scene of the play after some discussion about film conventions, then shows the opening sequence of Baz Luhrmann's film. Although she then resists the students' requests to view more of the film in this same lesson, the

class get to watch the whole film between lessons 4 and 6. In contrast, Beth stages the viewing of the film version of *Henry V* across a number of lessons so that it runs more in sequence with the small amounts of reading her class undertake. For Beth's year 10 class, it is the Branagh film rather than the printed playtext that takes precedence in the classroom, although this is neither commented on, nor interrogated.

Although the TIE performances appear to have little impact on the year 9 classroom practice observed, references by teachers and students to specific film or video productions are embedded in normal classroom discourse. The exception to this is in Felicity's classroom, where the teacher makes just the one isolated comment, 'We finished watching the video on Wednesday' during the 6th lesson I observed, and then invites her students to make a list of 'five things you can remember from watching the video' in order to get a sense of 'the play as a whole'. She goes on to compile a plot summary on the board, thus exploiting the video version entirely for storyline rather than as a dramatic actualisation.

Both Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* and Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* prove to be popular with their student audiences. Students in both classrooms ask to see more of the respective film, with Pip's students particularly enthusiastic about the film version of *Romeo + Juliet* – at one point a student spontaneously exclaims, 'It's more better!' The following extract comes from the first lesson I observed where the students have been watching the opening sequence from Luhrmann's film:

Sequence 4(26)

S: Can we see more of the film?
T: [shuffling papers on her desk, looking down] Not today. I'll show you more on Monday, I promise, OK, but at the moment I want to take a look at this sheet I've -
S: Miss, will we be watching different clips?
T: [still sorting papers, looking up now] We will be looking at different clips.
S: Will we see more of that one?
T: Well we will be on Monday - it just depends which bits we're looking at [starts to give sheets out] I don't just want to show you the whole thing.

S: Miss, why can't we just watch the whole thing?
S: Exactly!
S: That one's so good!
T: Remember I've got your best interests at heart, OK?
S: But miss, it's alright to watch it all
T: No, it's not alright to watch it all
S: Oh please!

[Pa R&J 1, p.18]

In fact, despite Pip's apparent dismissal of film at this point – in favour of a worksheet – she actually constructs *Romeo and Juliet* in film terms for her students right from the start of reading the text itself (in the third lesson of the sequence) when she invites her students to think of films they have seen which have dramatic opening scenes:

Sequence 4(27)

T: ...OK, the reason I wanted you to talk about some openings that you have seen is because the intro to *Romeo and Juliet* works in exactly the same way and you could always argue, I think, that Shakespeare might have, sort of, started that model for having a really dramatic action-packed opening. And what might be the reason film-makers and playwrights and authors would want to have a dramatic opening like that? (2) Go on, Kursheed.
Kursheed: Cause it makes you want to watch it
T: It reels you in, doesn't it? It makes you want to watch on. And if you imagine a play being on a stage, and there's a dramatic opening, it makes you want to find out what happens next, doesn't it? Any other ideas? We've, you're going to say the same thing? That's pretty much it, isn't it, why they want these openings to be so good, so effective, don't they?

[Pa R&J 1, p.5]

The Luhrmann film remains a continuing reference point in Pip's classroom. For instance in the first lesson I observed she asks the students to reflect on the way the film-makers dramatise the opening scene, then to consider the way 'the hate between the two families is set up'; the second lesson I observed begins with Pip prompting the students to recall how the atmosphere develops in Luhrmann's enactment of the party scene (Act 1, sc 5). When groups of students are later engaged in acting/directing sections of Act 1 scene 5 (the scene selected by the

teacher as the focus for their coursework essay), Pip encourages the students to recollect the film version. Later in interview, she praises the film for helping the students 'get an understanding of the whole story quite quickly', but reveals a concern that when it came to writing the essay 'a lot of the weaker kids will be saying things like "Juliet shoots herself"...' so she tried to 'steer them away from understanding the film rather than understanding the play'. It's an interesting comment in that Pip clearly recognises that the film text is a very particular interpretation of the playtext, yet in most of her lessons the film text is used in a way that serves to blur this distinction.

Perhaps not surprisingly for an experienced Media Studies teacher, Beth introduces students to *Henry V* through the medium of moving-image text. In the first lesson I observed (the third lesson in the teaching sequence) Beth asks students to deconstruct the image of King Henry's first entrance in the play (at the opening of Act 1, scene 2) using a still photo taken from Branagh's film version (sequence 4(55), below). Branagh's film version remains the key reference point throughout the observed lessons. Beth repeatedly reminds students about scenes they have watched on video, or promises the next instalment. However, attention is not drawn to this particular production as being different from Shakespeare's playtext nor indeed any other enactment of the play; neither acting nor direction draw any comment from students or teacher during any of the observed lessons.

4.3.2 'Active Shakespeare' methods

Not only did Marie at Eastgate employ drama-based methods most frequently out of the four teachers (with Felicity the least), but she also used the widest range of active drama approaches (spread across two-thirds of the lessons observed), as indicated in Table 4c below.

Table 4c: showing number of lessons where active drama approaches were employed

Teacher, school	Class	lessons using drama methods	% of total
Marie, Eastgate	Yr 9	4 out of 6	66
Felicity, Parkside	Yr9	0 out of 9	0
Beth, Eastgate	Yr10	3 out of 5	60
Pip, Parkside	Yr10	2 out of 5	40

Given the prevalence of 'active Shakespeare' approaches in commercial publications, teachers' textbooks and in-service training (see Chapter 2), my expectations were that each of the four teachers would use a range of Gibson-inspired drama-based activities in the classroom – particularly as each of them was sufficiently confident in their Shakespeare teaching skills to volunteer to take part in my research. What surprised me was that Felicity avoided drama activities altogether, apart from apportioning parts and asking students to read scenes out loud in class. This is even more surprising since she trained originally as a drama teacher[41]. Whilst Pip's scheme of work pivots around students' own productions of Act 1 scene 5 in preparation for an essay about this scene, the actual scope for students to develop their own interpretations is limited to taking parts and acting a section of the scene out, heavily guided by lengthy explanatory remarks by the teacher to each group in turn, as in the following example:

Sequence 4(28)

T: [sitting with a small group] ...So what you need to do here convey Romeo's emotion. Imagine whoever decides to play Romeo you've just seen the love of your life, love at first sight and [unclear]. You've got to show the change in atmosphere through this part of the scene. So you've got Romeo saying [softens voice] '...did my heart love til now' and you've got Tybalt going [puts on menacing tone of voice] 'who's that over there and what's he doing?' So you've got to show in the way that you speak the line - as it says you've not got any props so you

[41] In interview Felicity cites concerns about the behaviour of the year 9 class as the reason why she avoided drama as a teaching strategy.

need to just show it through the way you say the lines. Um, how are you going to show Tybalt's anger? How will you show this tense part of the scene? So, you decide how you're going to do it (.) um, so you start mid-scene, page 16-18 if you can find it. [T gets up and fetches her photocopy]. Capulet's just welcomed his guests and you've got the middle of page 16 he says to the servant, 'What lady's that which doth enrich the hand of yonder knight?' Who's that holding hands with - it's Paris she's dancing with at this point. So, if you start from there and then we've got Romeo his speech,'O she does teach the torches to burn bright', she's lovely, she's beautiful. And then you've got Tybalt and Capulet (.) um and Tybalt says, 'This, by his voice, should be a Montague,' he at once recognises Romeo (.) um, so you go all the way down bottom of page 17 [she indicates what she means on her script] finish here line 90 'I will withdraw, but this intrusion shall now seeming sweet convert to bitterest gall'. So Tybalt's saying, 'I'm not going to start anything now, but later on I'm going to get him back for this'. OK? So, you've got quite a lot to do in this scene so you need to decide how you're going to show that. Right? [one student nods] Good, have a go at just the lines. We've not got long left of the lesson. Think how you might go about this, how you might play it and then we'll see on Monday how you're going with that. Alright? Sure? [two Ss nod] OK [she gets up]. If you've got any questions just ask. [She moves off to another group].

[Pa R&J2, pp.17-18]

Rehearsal time is confined to approximately 10 minutes' reading time at the end of this lesson and 20 minutes practising in the next (Pa R&J3). Although the students are actively engaged and appear enthusiastic in this drama-based work, the teacher contributes little drama specialist input and the subsequent presentations are very basic in their visualisation of the scene, rather one-dimensional with little movement or direction, and more akin to rehearsed readings rather than acting or creative direction.

Neither Beth nor Marie at Eastgate trained as drama teachers, but they each routinely integrate drama strategies into their Shakespeare teaching, revealing a confident familiarity with 'active Shakespeare' methods, underlining for students that they are dealing with a playtext. In two-thirds of the observed lessons (four out of the six) Marie, for instance, incorporates improvisation, role play, small group acting/directing of scenes, whole-class collaborative direction of pivotal moments, tableaux, and costume creation. For Marie's students, *Macbeth* is initially conceptualised through the dramatising of selected themes ('betrayal',

'bravery', 'power', friendship', 'supernatural'), where small groups of students devise improvisations, productions which reference aspects of their own lives (including adolescent friendships, playground settings and television genres such as soap operas and adverts). In setting up drama-based activities, Marie appeals to students' drama skills and prior knowledge:

Sequence 4(29)

T: ... Now, I know in this class you are fantastic at drama, so I'm not expecting you to have too many problems at getting started yourselves. But if you are stuck, put your hand up and I'll come and give you a start.

[Ea Mac1, pp.1-2]

Marie makes explicit cross-curricular links with the students' experience of drama lessons, as for instance when she borrows strategies commonly practised in drama as a specialist subject:

Sequence 4(30)

T: Sorry, sorry, er, before we start, can I enforce a little drama practice which I'm sure you've done with Ms Smith [the drama teacher]. You know, where you show you're about to begin your performance by freezing in position and when you finish you freeze in position, you stop and freeze. Then we know when you're starting and finishing, OK?

[Ea Mac1, p.5]

Marie's active Shakespeare practice is discursively embedded in the language she uses in the classroom. She commonly refers to *Macbeth* as a 'play' rather than a text or a book; she makes a point of referring to student readers as 'actors'; through the course of the transcribed lessons the terms she uses include: 'scene', 'aside', 'voice-over', 'stage direction', 'audience', 'director', 'production', 'stage', 'in the round', 'dialogue', 'freeze-frame', 'tableaux', 'spotlight'.

Beth's range of active drama methods is narrower than Marie's and she tends to rely on writing in role and using improvised role play as a way of predicting narrative outcomes or character's reactions. In each case these activities arise as an extension of watching the film rather than reading the playtext, although on

occasions students are given small extracts of printed text after the activity as a way of checking if their predictions were right. For example, in the first recorded lesson (Ea HV1) Beth asks one student to be Henry and one to be the French Ambassador presenting the King with a mystery gift:

Sequence 4(31)

T: Right, OK, Henry (.) Henry now comes in, and I want someone here to stand at the front and be Henry. Yeah. OK, Owsun. [Owsun gets up and moves to front] And I want somebody else to come [turns to Owsun] come and stand over here where there's a bit of space. Ok, Henry has just come in (.) walked in through this door. He's now um (.) he's now standing there and the French ambassador (.) I need a volunteer to be the French ambassador [a few Ss make stereotypical French sounds] don't worry about the language, you're going to give Henry a present.
[Several Ss put up hand and call out]
Unur: I don't mind!
T: OK, Unur [S gets up and come to the front. Noise levels rise a little] OK, the French ambassador... How do you think the French ambassador is feeling as he walks up to Henry to give this present?
Unur: Scared and nervous.
T: Scared and nervous. Right. Why are you feeling scared and nervous?
Unur: because he's afraid he might get killed.
T: And he's representing his country. Kadife what were you saying?
Kadife: Might get killed.
T: Might get killed. Good.
Richard: He shouldn't, he's an ambassador.
T: Yup, shouldn't do, because he's an ambassador, he should be protected, but he's a bit worried. OK. What do you think (.) Graham, what do you think is the message you, er, he is going to say? He's already had a message that Henry wants to invade France. What do you think the French ambassador is going to say to that?
Ss: [various, making stereotypical French sounds]
T: Listen! Dexter?
Dexter: We don't want war, we want to make peace.
T: We don't want war, we want peace, OK. But what else might, probably, the King of France think if the King of England writes and says, I want your country?
S: [in French accent] Idiot!
T: Idiot. Perhaps.
Ade: War!

[Ea HV1, p.12]

Students are next invited to predict what might be in the parcel (suggestions

include ‘a bomb’, ‘a head’), then Unur, in role as the Ambassador, hands over the box, and Owsun is directed to open the present (which he does in suitably dramatic fashion). The teacher leads a whole-class discussion as to what tennis balls might symbolise; all students are then asked to jot down what they think Henry’s response is likely to be. These ideas are read out to the class, following which students have a look at photocopied extracts from Henry’s actual speech. In the following sequence, students’ contributions reveal creativity and playfulness, as they explore tennis as a metaphor:

Sequence 4(32)

T: ...We’ll hear a few ideas, what’s Henry going to say and then (.)...I’m then going to very, very quickly show you a little bit of what Henry does actually say...
Ade: [in role] ‘He's suggesting I should go play tennis. This is a great insult. If he wants to play with me, we’ll play on the battlefield’.
T: Brilliant. Yeah. [indicates another S with hand up] Right, OK, Dexter? (2) OK, listen!
Dexter: [in role] ‘How dare you! The cheek! I should kill you for the thought against a King!’
T: Good. Right, Karen?
Karen: I don't want to
T: Go on! Or shall I read it then? [moves across to Karen. Reads her work] ‘Is this a joke? OK, if he wants to stick tennis balls, um, then (2) [she consults Karen] off with his pig-head. He's got another think coming! I want his head and when I do, I'll play tennis with it and let that be a warning to him!’ OK, excellent!

[Ea HV1, pp.17-18]

Apportioning parts and reading scenes aloud in class is a practice common to three out of the four teachers (Beth’s students in fact read very little text at all, in the conventional sense; on the two occasions when Beth wants her students to look closely at one of Henry’s speeches, she reads it aloud for the class). Whereas Marie takes reading parts as an opportunity to emphasise the dramatic nature of the play (for example, by setting up a ‘reading circle’ of selected readers at the front of the class, ‘because I think it helps you think of it as a play rather than as a book we’re just reading in class’), Felicity is keen that her year 9 class learn to read the script rhythmically and fluently as verse:

Sequence 4(33)

> **T:** [Points at individual students in turn] First witch, second witch, third witch. And, right, listen (2) Have you found it, Aisha? OK (3) this is a poem (.) right. A lot of time when Shakespeare uses verse he uses what is called blank verse and we're going to talk about it when we've got to grips with how it sounds. This is a poem (1) most of it rhymes, it's supposed to be almost like a song. But different people are doing different bits. What I want you to try to do, perhaps we can play with this a little bit, what I want you to try to do, is for the three of you – and the rest of you need to listen, because it's important to see how this works – I want you to say the first words, you start [indicates Jenny] but the second witch, when Jen gets to the last word, I want you to come in on that last word, so we don't have any gaps between anything that anybody says. (2) Right (.) so it's almost speaking over each other.
>
> [Pa Mac3, p.10]

Felicity is insistent that her students perfect this way of reading, so much so that she makes the class re-read the scene five times in succession (to the accompaniment of loud groans from several students by the final read-through). At one point she promises they might be able to 'act it out' and 'add some movement' but this is never actualised. She explains why she is asking them to read in this way:

Sequence 4(34)

> **T:** ... what I want you to understand is that this is something that we need to do all the way through. You don't wait necessarily for somebody to stop. When we're having a conversation, we don't necessarily wait for people to finish before we start speaking in response. And I don't want that sort of pause between each speech as we go through the play. I want you to be picking up, so if you pick up the word before it doesn't matter, right, it's just a question of actually learning how Shakespeare uses rhythm to put across (.) the play, to put across the narrative.
>
> [Pa Mac3, p.17]

When they come to read the second scene later in the same lesson, she demands that they concentrate on the punctuation so as not to automatically 'stop at the end of the line', a practice Felicity says she hates: 'If you start breaking it [the rhythm] and stopping at the end of every line and ignoring the punctuation you will lose the rhythm and you'll actually lose the sense' [Pa Mac3, p18]. For Felicity,

it appears to be technical aspects of drama (or acting) that she highlights, rather than exploratory or imaginative possibilities.

Active drama provides a common reference point in both Marie and Pip's lessons, a shared classroom experience that can be drawn on when tackling essay writing towards the end of the unit of work. In the example below, Marie directly relates drama work to the completion of a chart asking students to add stage directions next to given quotations:

Sequence 4(35)

T: ... we're adding something new here, we're adding stage directions, just in case you get a question about, asking how you direct the scene. Remember we've done some work where you have directed each other: (.) [changes voice slightly] "No, you should say it in a menacing tone of voice"; "I think you should have a really frightening expression on your face, and should be crouching down...". So we've got stage directions we'll be adding here.

[Ea Mac3, p.11]

As noted previously, the notion of collaborative knowledge-building in this class is discursively marked by Marie's use of first person plural here, and explicit links to previous lessons ('remember, we've done some work...'), a significant feature of Marie's language. In the following sequence Marie uses active drama to support revision for the SATs writing task in the penultimate lesson of the unit:

Sequence 4(36)

T: [beginning to move a table at the front as she speaks]...You don't need your books (.) Now I'm going to create – hey! hey! – now we'll clear the tables out here (.) and create a stage area in the middle, do you remember the time we did that thing in a circle? Ssh (3) Um and each (2) and each group performed a part of an overall scene. Well that's what we're doing today, putting a story together with each stage out of the set scenes, which just to remind you are all in Act 3 (.) scene 1, scene 2, scene 4 (.) They're the set scenes, OK? So, and what I've done, I've picked a couple of quotes from each set scene, and what I'm going to do is give each group a quote to work with. And what I want you to do, you can do whatever you like, it can be a mime, it could be a tableau, but you must use the line that I'm giving you. The purpose of this exercise is for you to remind yourselves what happens in this scene but then through your bit of drama to remind the rest of the class what happens in the set scene and you can use the

information in your group in a little while, OK, so as soon as you get your quote remind yourselves what happens in the scene, and then building up a little, a very short performance for the rest of the class. You might need the plays so I'll bring them round in a minute.

[Ea Mac6, p.2]

Marie's interventions as the students work on this task focus attention on interpretation of the lines, the context in which they are spoken and 'how you can bring them to the stage'. During the ensuing presentation each group steps silently into the acting space in turn, without any additional direction needed from the teacher. Whereas Felicity showed concern for her students acquiring individual technical skills in reading verse aloud, here Marie pushes her class to improve performance aspects in their groups:

Sequence 4(37)

T: ...That's absolutely fantastic. Superb for a first run through. I want to do it again (.). Actually the movement on and off stage was superb. What I want you to do this time is to think about your acting, I want you to think about your voice projection and your tone of voice, the way you deliver those lines, think about the expression on your face and the way you hold your body – all the work we've done on directing a scene. And remember, also, that one of the points of us doing this is to get the atmosphere that would be onstage as this was being acted. ...In your scene [indicates Liz's group] what are your lines?
Liz: Oh full of scorpions is my mind
T: So what point has he reached now?
Liz: Breaking point
T: Breaking point. Right, and you did a very good job of showing that breaking point by being attacked by lots of different scorpions. Can we have, who delivers the line? Right, let's hear that breaking point in your voice. Right show us with your body, what would your body be like, your face be like, your voice be like? OK?

[Ea Mac6, pp.7-9]

After the next presentation, each group takes responsibility for completing the section of an A3 chart that most closely corresponds with the part of the scene they have been working on. This chart will form the basis for a practice test essay entitled, 'How is power shown in the set scenes?' In this classroom, at least, the students are encouraged to lift the play off the page and consider it as something

to be enacted even within the constraints of the SATs test.

4.3.3 Drama terminology

All four teachers employ drama terminology in their Shakespeare lessons, although this is limited in Felicity's and Beth's cases to basic terms such as 'scene', 'stage direction' and 'entrance'. Although Beth uses some common drama strategies, such as role play, improvisation, or 'inner mind', she does not use the specialist drama terminology when setting the activities up. Pip's use of drama language is not extensive, but is noteworthy for referring to the text repeatedly as 'script' when students are acting and directing sections of it. She encourages her year 10 students to consider Shakespeare's 'stage craft', and the 'theatricality' of the focus scene in their essays. However, there is less evidence in all four classrooms of students themselves adopting the language of drama in their public talk (and in chapter 5, I indicate that this is also true of their essay writing). Marie, as indicated above, employs a wide range of drama terminology both in terms of treating the text as a playtext and when orchestrating drama-based activities in the classroom.

4.3.4 Theatre history

Felicity's introductory lessons on *Macbeth* focus very much on putting Shakespeare and his theatre into a historical perspective. This aspect is more marked by the two teachers at Parkside than the two at Eastgate, possibly reflecting differences in perspective suggested by responses to the teacher questionnaires (see Appendix L). In fact, Felicity's first six lessons are devoted to the beginnings of early European theatre, Shakespeare's theatre, historical evidence about Macbeth, and Shakespeare's life and times. The first three topics are largely delivered by the teacher in what are essentially mini-lectures, punctuated by infrequent, closed questions which serve to give the illusion that the knowledge is jointly constructed. These are what Cazden (2001, p.46) terms 'display' questions, a rhetorical sleight of hand which co-opts pupils into

participating in what is otherwise a didactic monologue:

Sequence 4(38)

T: OK, origins of theatre. We're going back as far as ancient Greeks, Greek theatre. Who knows what an amphitheatre is? (.) Who's seen an amphitheatre? (.) Who knows what shape they were? [T makes circular movement with hands].
S: Circular.
T: Circular. OK. Amphitheatres had the stage in the centre and the audience sat round the sides; they were built into hillsides. So the audience were ranked up above on the hillside (.) And it helped the acoustics… [to S at the back] Could you concentrate on what I'm doing instead of what Lee's doing! (.). And (.) it meant that the audience could actually hear because the theatre was absolutely massive. Thousands went to the theatres. To help the audience see the actors wore huge masks to actually allow the audience to work out the characters, but there wasn't a sense of characterisation, they just spoke the lines (.). It was actually, the Greeks were travellers, and they travelled round with plays and they would set up theatres and that's how theatre got to Rome, because perhaps through trade, perhaps through wars, and as the Romans conquered across Europe, they brought theatres with them across Europe. And the Roman Empire spread theatre across Europe and to England (.). But this is not actually how Shakespeare's theatre came into being (.1) from the point, er (.) alongside the Romans you've got the development of Christianity and (.) what language, what language, again this is something you've done in year 7, what language did Churches use?
Jimmy: Latin?
T: Latin. So, let's move on a few hundred years and let's think of England. Who knows what language did the ordinary people speak?
Amina: French
T: Actually, it was English – not very recognisable to us, but English is becoming the common language. It is developing as a language. [T checks time on watch and speeds her delivery up] And of course, they didn't understand the church services because they were in Latin. So the church decided that one way to actually help people understand the Bible stories, understand the services, was to act them out.

[Pa Mac1, pp.11-12]

Felicity's own accounts of theatre history are supplemented by use of a BBC television programme about Shakespeare's Globe both past and present, a 20 minute programme which is shown in the second half of the first lesson with barely any introductory comments by the teacher and summed up at the end by simply asking students to spend two minutes writing down 'two things you've

learnt from this video'. Homework is to find out how many plays Shakespeare wrote and to investigate the dates of Tudor reign. In the following four lessons students compile posters based on research into Shakespeare's life and times (discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). In a later lesson (Pa Mac3), when asking students to think about why the play opens with the stage direction 'thunder and lightning', Felicity exhorts the students to recall what the BBC video revealed about stage conditions in Shakespeare's time, but this is an isolated example of any form of development of these early lessons in theatre history.

Pip also covers Shakespeare's Globe with her year 10 students, in the second lesson of the series (but one which I was not able to observe). In addition, she occasionally alludes to Jacobean theatre conventions during more general class discussions. One example occurs in the seventh lesson of the series (the second I observed) when students have completed a worksheet focusing on characters in the play:

> ***Sequence 4(39)***
>
> **S:** How old is Juliet?
> **T:** Well it certainly, in those days, it suggests that she's 14. Lady Capulet tells us that she's 14. But remember in Shakespeare's day she'd be played by a young boy with a high pitched voice, wouldn't she, so (.) it's problematic anyway, and certainly the version we've been watching Claire Danes is older than 14 (.) er you have different versions of it (.) [turns to IWB]
>
> [Pa R&J2, p.4]

Other brief allusions to the historical context of *Romeo and Juliet* are less about stage conditions and more about differences in the way the play might have been received between the sixteenth century and now.

4.4 Shakespeare as Icon

4.4.1 Shakespeare constructed as a cultural icon: There are wide areas of divergence in the way Shakespeare is constructed iconically within the four

classrooms under study, possibly related to ideological differences between the four teachers' approaches, both pedagogically and in terms of literary theory (and compare with results of the teacher survey, Appendix L). At some point in the unit of work each teacher constructs Shakespeare as a component of 'our' cultural inheritance. This is a feature least often located in Beth's lessons, but most marked in Felicity's, whose whole approach to *Macbeth* is seen through a 'high' cultural lens.

Marie's understanding of cultural inheritance appears to be summed up in her comment in the opening lesson:

Sequence 4(40)

T: ... Um, the next question we're going to ask, is what do we already know about Macbeth? Because although you may not think it, Shakespeare and all the things that Shakespeare wrote (.)form part (.) of a consciousness that exists in our world, in our cultural world, in society. And all sorts of references to Macbeth and to other plays that Shakespeare wrote, sometimes that we're not even aware of. (.) So I want to find out what you already know of Macbeth before I start teaching it to you. Because there's not much point in me teaching you things you already know. But we can build on the things you already know.

[Ea Mac1, p.8]

Marie appears to assume a shared cultural knowledge, an assumption underlined by the use of first person plural pronouns; that this shared cultural knowledge is likely to include Shakespeare differs from the assumptions Felicity makes, in that Marie presupposes all her students have something to contribute to this discussion and that she is not starting from a cultural blank sheet. Although Felicity starts from the same point as Marie, by asking the question: 'What prior knowledge do we have about Shakespeare?', her students are positioned quite differently in relation to the subject-matter. Immediately as the students attempt to respond in groups to her question, she effectively undermines their efforts with a number of critical reactions, as for example:

Sequence 4(41)

T: [circulating around the room as groups are working. To one group, reading

what they've written] 'He wrote plays'. I want something more interesting than that! What do you think he wrote? [Whole class falls quiet, listening to T talking to group]

Individual students are invited to write suggestions up on the board. Their initial offerings ('he did lots of plays'; 'He wrote Romeo and Juliet'; 'he had his own theater [sic]'; he wrote tragedys [sic]'; 'he wrote old English') are met with a dismissive 'I'm getting a bit worried with how little knowledge you seem to have' from Felicity. A couple of additions later, she comments: 'Not much of a list, I must say!' and then she rejects offers from another student to name individual plays, instead demanding: 'Does anyone know how many plays he wrote?' Students' various guesses are dismissed as 'random numbers' and Felicity then instructs her class to find out for homework. Students' naivety is even mocked as in the following exchange:

Sequence 4(42)

T:…And you'll also need to find out the dates for the Tudor times.
Afzal: Henry VIII
Emma: Is Shakespeare still alive?
T: [sarcastic tone] Yes, he writes plays for the BBC…
[various Ss mock Emma]
Zufie: Did they put his brain into something?
T: [ignores Zufie, turns to look at the board] So, we don't have much information here, do we? What else do we know?
Ellie: Was he around in the 1930s?
Ss: [various muttering of dates]
T: We'll move on. Find out.

[Pa Mac1, pp.7-8]

The students' naivety in asking whether Shakespeare is still alive, or whether his brain has been preserved are easy to dismiss as amusing examples of childish ignorance. However, from a literary and cultural point of view, these represent a moment in the lesson which potentially offers a really productive starting-point for discussion about the iconic status of Shakespeare, what preconceptions the students have and where these come from. Instead the potential for demystifying and exploring 'Shakespeare' as cultural construction is rejected in favour of the

pursuit of facts and dates, and an implicit denial of the students' own cultural capacities. Despite the original invitation to pool their prior knowledge, the students' apparent ignorance is highlighted instead. In a later lesson when Felicity is about to start reading the opening scene of *Macbeth* with the class (Pa Mac3), she grandly holds her copy of the text aloft and asserts through closed question and answer that they are about to read '*Macbeth* by William Shakespeare', privileging the Bard as author just at the point of entry to the sacred text itself.

Felicity's colleague, Pip, also begins her scheme of work by inviting students to pool their prior knowledge of *Romeo and Juliet* (during the opening lesson, not observed by me), but in the lessons I observed she attempts to position her students rather differently to the entity Shakespeare than Felicity does (for example, by drawing on the students' own cultural knowledge of film as a genre). Pip, like Marie, assumes that Shakespeare and *Romeo and Juliet* will have formed part of her students' shared cultural knowledge, a presupposition at the heart of comments such as: ' We always think it's a love story of Romeo and Juliet, but it's also based around all of this hate, this hate between two families'. However, when Pip is setting up the coursework essay during the final lesson she takes the opportunity to draw attention to Shakespeare's cultural status in a way which is, despite the initial invitation to open it up for discussion, ultimately non-negotiable:

Sequence 4(43)

T: ...Um, in your conclusion, er, a conclusion works in the same way as an introduction, you need to sum up your ideas OK, so address the title, again, so, 'How are the themes of love and hate dramatised in the scene? Refer to the points in your essay'. So sum up the points you've made, talk about Tybalt, talk about Romeo, discuss how the theme presented, themes presented here are still relevant today and what you might say about Shakespeare's works. So thinking about why Shakespeare is still studied in school. Why 400 year old, why, er, why is he important for us, what we've been looking at today? [a couple of Ss begin to murmur in dissent. T raises voice] And even if you don't like him -
Muna: [interrupts] Why is he?
S: Yeah!
T: Why is he? Let's have a discussion about it?

Abeola: No!
T: Well, everyone apart from Abeola wants to have a discussion about it apparently!
Ben: He's famous!
T: I don't think that's anything to do with it. Why, why particularly, perhaps not just Shakespeare, why has this story stayed so popular over the years? (2) What is it about it?
S: People growing up
Abeola: because this happens a lot in real life
T: Right, explain
Abeola: Oh my god [smiles]
Muna: [incredulous tone] What, killing yourself because Juliet loves another man, right?
T: Maybe, er, maybe, that exact story doesn't happen in real life, but I think I know what Abeola's getting at.
Ezekiel: It's a good story
T: OK. it's a good story, right. Why is it a good story? Why do so many millions of people 400 years ago and today read, or er, go and see the play or the film and really enjoy it? Why, er (.) even if you didn't particularly enjoy it? Why do we enjoy it? (.) What, what is it about it that's enjoyable? OK? [indicates S with hand up]
S: Coz Shakespeare is famous
T: So is that why we enjoy the story, though, because Shakespeare is famous? (.) Right, think between the lines
Anjna: It's a catchy story
Joe: It's got lots of things like love and fighting and death
T: Right, it's got everything, it's got the ingredients of a really great story, hasn't it? We've got love, we've got hate, we've got fighting, we've got violence, er, think about when we first started when you were thinking of, er, the openings of films that are really dramatic and are action-packed... So it's about characters, it's about themes, it's about emotions that are expressed in the play that people today can relate to as much now as they could do back then. Everyone's been in love, everyone's been hurt, everyone's had an argument with somebody they're close to and so you can relate to these kinds of things. OK that's my argument anyway, and I think that, um, and I think that it's a valid argument, so something that you might think about putting in your essay, OK. Right. We're through with that now. Are there any questions about the essay?

[Pa R&J5, pp.18-20]

It is interesting here that students do challenge Pip's view of Shakespeare's cultural importance – a rare moment of dissent in Pip's classroom. But for all Pip's earlier attempt to frame *Romeo and Juliet* in terms her students can connect with,

she is by the end of the unit of work unprepared to concede any cultural ground. It is as if by enabling students to gain access to *Romeo and Juliet* she expects them to emerge having had a uniformly positive experience, appreciating Shakespeare as a cultural colossus. Although she does at one point in the above sequence suggest that it is a legitimate response not to enjoy Shakespeare ('if you didn't particularly enjoy it'), this is immediately contradicted by her question 'why do we enjoy it?', where use of the first person plural underlines the apparent universality of a positive response. She leaves the dissenters with the impression that their opinion of Shakespeare's cultural worth is intellectually weaker than hers, as is implied by her suggestion that it is only her argument that deserves a place in their GCSE coursework essays. Furthermore, she refuses to acknowledge that Shakespeare's iconic status, raised by the two students who try to explain Shakespeare's enduring popularity with the comment 'He's famous', might have any significance in this discussion. On the one hand she began the unit of work on *Romeo and Juliet* with the expectation that all of her class would have some prior knowledge of Shakespeare or the play itself; on the other she avoids holding up to any scrutiny Shakespeare as a cultural construction - for example, how that reputation has been shaped and disseminated. The emphatic discourse markers at the end of the sequence ('OK'; 'Right') are further strengthened by the statement 'we're through with that now', forcefully communicating the end of any further discussion.

At other times, Pip (along with Felicity) makes claims to Shakespeare's pre-eminence as a writer. For Pip, 'Shakespeare especially is the master of the English language'; and after students have talked about favourite film openings, she claims that 'you could always argue, I think, that Shakespeare might have, sort of, started that model for having a really dramatic action-packed opening' (Pa R&J1, p.5). Although she hedges this statement with doubt in three ways ('I think'; 'might have'; 'sort of'), the message students pick up appears to be unequivocal, and in Chapter 5 I discuss the way students from her year 10 class later ascribe even the enduring qualities of TV soap opera to Shakespeare. Most crudely of all, a cover teacher supervising Felicity's students for one lesson as they work on their

Shakespeare posters circulates the room exclaiming 'Shakespeare! Shakespeare! The greatest playwright ever!' whenever students stray from their task.

As indicated in Chapter One, a very strong feature of the Conservative government's original reasons for incorporating Shakespeare in the National Curriculum was bound up with notions of national identity and pride in one's heritage. This is a concept distinctly lacking in Marie's and Beth's teaching, but there is a suggestion of it in Pip's claim that Shakespeare represents the best writing in English (cited earlier). Felicity's year 9 students' questions as to whether Shakespeare has had his brain preserved, or whether he is still alive (see above) carry connotations of Shakespeare as an enduring symbol of genius, an ever-present national figure of literary culture. Felicity asks if her students know the name of Shakespeare's theatre and one student immediately suggests 'the Royal Albert Hall', site of key national (and nationalistic) events such as the last night of the Proms. The television programme about the Globe theatre Felicity shows in the same lesson is made by the BBC, to many people another institutional source of national pride. The programme itself opens with images of a great dusty leather-bound tome opening to reveal an engraving of Shakespeare's bust, these visuals overlaid by breathlessly-voiced, stirring quotations from *Henry V* amongst other plays. It is a view of Shakespeare presumably designed by the programme-makers to strike students with appropriate feelings of awe and pride.

As in the BBC example above, *Henry V* is very often taken to be the literary byword in patriotic verse, yet Beth is remarkable for the fact that this never manifests itself in her teaching; the conventionally nationalistic combination of Henry V and Shakespeare is completely avoided by Beth in each of the observed lessons. The nearest she comes is to spend part of one lesson exploring national stereotypes. At one point in the fifth recorded lesson when she is setting up the coursework essay (on attitudes to war), she simply reminds her class that 'Henry was a hero figure' (Ea HV5, p.4) but does not develop the point any further. In an earlier lesson (Ea HV3), students complain that the Prologue figure gives away the story at key points in the film's action. Beth's response is to remind the students that

for Shakespeare's audience the story of Henry V's French victories would be well-known anyway. In fact, this is a rare reference in Beth's classroom to Shakespeare as even the author.

4.4.2 Shakespeare constructed as intellectual icon

Shakespeare is also imbued with notions of intellectualism, a benchmark of educational achievement, as is heavily suggested, for instance, by the very existence of the Shakespeare SATs test. This is only occasionally invoked explicitly, but is implied in a number of ways in the classrooms under study. Pip, for instance, is at pains to reassure her students that they should not be too anxious about tackling Shakespeare – ironically, by implication constructing Shakespeare as bearing a high degree of difficulty. Teachers' assumption appears to be that the majority of students will feel some anxiety as to their ability to cope with it. Shakespeare's complexity is further highlighted by Pip's suggestion that even English teachers do not fully understand it:

Sequence 4(44)

> **T:** Right, class, we're actually starting the text today. As I said the other day, even I don't understand every word. It's not about that, though. It's about understanding what these characters are feeling (.) er, and what they're saying to each other more generally really at the moment. So don't worry too much about that. [Pa R&J1, p.1]

When preparing her students for the coursework essay, Pip stresses the degree of difficulty that it carries:

Sequence 4(45)

> **T:** ...there's a lot to think about. But as you've seen in the success criteria there is a lot to do to get your good grades. So I'm not saying it's going to be easy to do, it's going to be hard work, but that's why I've given you quite a while to get this first draft done. [Pa R&J5, p.20]

Pip emphasises that the Shakespeare coursework has been saved to the last 'so you want to make it good...so, really try, year 10, put your heart and soul into your

essay...I'd like to read some outstanding stuff next week' (Pa R&J5, p.20). Pip's subsequent comments about Shakespeare's importance as a part of the exam system when she defends the study of *Romeo and Juliet* in the face of students' challenges (as discussed in sequence 4(43) above), supports the idea that Shakespeare retains a special place in the final stages of the National Curriculum. Felicity's class are individually issued with a commercially-produced pack of SATs-focused materials on *Macbeth* (although not the playtext itself!), signalling that this study of Shakespeare is not only specialised, but also of a degree of complexity that demands expert support. Marie separates out the 'fun' work on the play (eg., drama) from what she describes as the kind of work 'we call academic', which signposts the commencement of study on the set scenes. In the sixth lesson of the series (Mac3) she goes on to outline in some detail what each SATs test constitutes, and emphasises that the students will need to do test practice in order to reach an adequate level of competence.

Ironically, I believe that it is in Beth's classroom, where so little text is read, that Shakespeare's iconic intellectual status is most strongly emphasised, albeit indirectly. Like Pip, Beth appears anxious to reassure her year 10 class that they can understand Shakespeare; at a discursive level that anxiety emerges in her repeated use of 'OK?' or 'yeah?' as an apparent appeal for co-operation. For example, in the first lesson I recorded she stresses how easy the in-role activity is, where students must imagine they are one of the courtiers, clerics or guards gathered to witness the meeting between Henry and the French Ambassador (Act 1, scene 2):

Sequence 4(46)

T: Right, basically, I'm going to give every person a slip telling you who you are, OK, You need to come up with one or two sentences and then I'm going to ask you to (.) stand up if you want or sit (.) and tell us your reaction to Henry coming in. Yeah? (2) OK? Yeah, nothing more difficult than that, just a couple of sentences, and it's not in Shakespearean language, just in modern English, OK? Yeah? Can you do that?
[Ea HV1, p.9]

In a later lesson (HV3), following an activity where students are asked to predict what Henry might say to his troops on the eve of the Battle of Agincourt, Beth asks students to turn to Henry's actual speech (Act 4, scene 3, lines 30-67). By reassuring students that they are not expected to read the 37 lines themselves (Beth reads it out loud for them) and by providing a worksheet with a translation of key lines, Beth gives the impression that this text is far too difficult for the class to understand:

Sequence 4(47)

T: ...OK, just have ago at this. I'm not worried whether you understand every little bit. Look at page 145 and this sheet of paper I've given you, yeah? Which says 'Before Agincourt how does Henry encourage his outnumbered army?' It says to write your answers in, but I'm not asking you to write, just to listen. OK. Then underneath it says in modern English - that means ordinary English to us – we have a few lines from this speech. OK. How Henry is encouraging people. So this is the modern English on the sheet, OK? Everybody got that? OK, right. Just read it through. "We are few, but we are brothers". OK, that's the King speaking to his soldiers, saying we are few but we are brothers. He says, "Tell the army that anyone who can't face fighting, leave now. If so, we'll give you your passport and money". OK?

[Ea HV3, pp. 10-11]

Despite this level of micro-support, Ade and Owsun (both of whom achieved level 5, the government bench-mark, in their KS3 English SATs the previous summer) voice doubts that they will cope with this very simple exercise:

Sequence 4(48)

T: ...What we'll do, yeah, is read the scene through. Don't worry if you can't understand every word. You won't. But what I just want you to try and do, try and find as I read it just put your hand up as I get to any of these things on this sheet. Yeah?
Ade: Ok. <u>If</u> we can understand it!
T: Just see what you can spot.
Owsun: Yeah, let's see <u>if</u> we can understand it!
Jayden: It's true!
T: That's what I am saying. Just get the gist of it, don't worry if -
Ade: [interrupts] But it's this Shakespeare language, the thees and thous!
Linh: [turns round waving the worksheet] It's in English on the sheet, you idiot!

T: Calm down! [several Ss are chipping in at this point. Not clear]
S: Line 59!
T: [looks at book] Line 59, is it? (.) It's line 60, isn't it. See it says, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers". [Looks up at the student] Well done for spotting it. [smiles] See you can do it! OK, so, if I just read through as soon as you [several Ss are still muttering] OK, good, right, so I'm reading. [T reads Henry's speech from Act 4, scene 3, lines 30-67. At the point where the reference is made to no stomach for the fight/passport only one student puts up his hand]
T: [looks up] Bode?
Bode: Give them the passport and the money

[Ea HV3, pp.12-13]

This is a class which is normally responsive during discussions or drama activities, yet here only Bode demonstrates willingness to fulfil a simple text-focused task. Again, in the lesson where Beth sets up the GCSE coursework (HV 5), she is quick to reassure the class that, 'It's quite straightforward in the sense that you're not going to be writing about a large amount of text, so that will make it quite easy. So do not panic about it.' (HV5, p.2). In fact the coursework demands students read a total of only 137 lines from the whole play (Act 3 scenes 1, 2 and 4), with an essay title carefully designed to obviate the necessity of referring to any other parts of the play. Instead of reading the printed form of these scenes in class, Beth shows the Harfleur scenes from the Branagh film once again and supplies the students with photocopies of the specific scenes on which she has already made handwritten annotations and underlined key quotations. In order to satisfy the relevant GCSE assessment criteria (which at that time presupposed that a study of the complete printed text has been undertaken), Beth unintentionally conveys the impression that unmediated Shakespeare is extraordinarily difficult, beyond the capabilities of these students.

When interviewed, Beth suggests that it is not only Shakespeare's language that 'alarms students', but Shakespeare's cultural reputation too. Beth explicitly takes up issues of class, rejecting the notion that Shakespeare poses greater challenges culturally in urban, multi-ethnic schools:

> **Beth:**...I think it's much more that there is (.) there is to an extent a cultural thing that, you know (.) obviously the sort of fetishism of Shakespeare and that can actually (.) that can have quite a powerful effect and that can put some students off; I mean, oddly enough I think it tends to put off more working-class white students actually because they are more aware of the sort of the significance of Shakespeare as a sort of cultural fetish which actually (.) so I think, you know, there are lots of myths around the so-called difficulty with urban classes and I'm not convinced it is as simple as that anyway. Having said that, I mean I think there are (.) I think you do have a big thing about Shakespeare. It's difficult and I think a lot of students will say that without even knowing anything very much about Shakespeare, I mean I started doing *The Tempest* with my year 9s a couple of weeks ago, we did something as an introductory activity which was, I can't remember what it was, but it didn't explicitly say we are doing *The Tempest*. But the kids said, 'Oh well are we doing Shakespeare? Are we doing *The Tempest*?' as if to say *The Tempest*, Shakespeare is boring, you know, and that was before they read a word. So I think there is still that cultural thing...

In her later remarks, Beth specifically makes reference to cultural capital as a concept; for her, therefore, some bi-lingual students are at an advantage in that the class connotations are not part of their 'cultural backgrounds in the same way'. Perhaps not surprisingly, all four teachers comment on students' preconceptions about Shakespeare – that reading a play will be both boring and difficult. Pip suggests that her teenage self would have been in agreement and calls these assumptions 'a block', but a block which these days can be overcome with use of a good film version. Pip found that girls in her class were excited about studying *Romeo and Juliet* once they knew they would be watching Leonardo DiCaprio in the film version. Felicity, however, not only states that negative attitudes to Shakespeare are widespread amongst pupils whose cultural background excludes visits to live theatre, but she goes further in suggesting that her pupils lack an understanding of film as a cultural medium too:

> **Felicity:** ...But then again, these kids, it's not only Shakespeare that's alien (.) theatre is alien (.) and, er, that whole concept of how entertainment of that sort works. It just, huh, it doesn't happen. They don't go. They don't even see the connection between this and cinema. And if they could see the connection then maybe then they'd be more willing, but they don't.

Felicity is alone in thinking that her students will not make a connection with film versions, and appears to deny her students any cultural agency at all. Whilst not making explicit references to social class in her analysis, an underlying theme of Felicity's interview is the implication that 'top set' students are less alienated by Shakespeare and that the main problem is 'parents who just don't engage with their children'. On the other hand, Marie regards the challenge as a pedagogic one, rather than cultural deficit. In Marie's opinion, levels of teacher confidence are crucial in overcoming students' inverted 'snobbery...that Shakespeare is rubbish', along with reassuring pupils that they will be able to cope.

At some point in their interviews, all of the teachers pinpoint density of language as an area of difficulty. Beth explains the problem by use of an analogy with learning a foreign language, whereby the act of literal translation is a reductive or 'flattening' process:

> **Beth:** ...a lot of Shakespeare you get the sense or an image or a meaning because you are inferring in your reading. You know, like if you are reading in French, sort of following an image through and if they, it's quite difficult to get them into that, you know, and sometimes I think that is one of the difficulties, if they read it literally it comes out flat, and once you start working with images I think it makes it stronger, I think that's why, you know, trying to do more dramatic approaches, trying to get do, trying to get them to actually say the words to each other, can actually make it so much more alive

Felicity suggests that Shakespeare poses particular challenges for students who have English as an Additional Language: '...you're teaching them basically yet another language'. However, Marie counters this last notion, pointing out that many school students struggle with any 'classic' literary text, therefore Shakespeare poses no greater challenge in this respect, and actually positions EAL and non-EAL students more equally.

4.4.3 Shakespeare as a moral icon

As discussed in Chapter 2, within the framework of liberal humanism, it is taken for granted that Shakespeare embodies universal human values, each play containing moral lessons on how we might best live our lives. The assumption is that the plays speak to each of us in the same way. Marie's thematic approach in the opening lesson suggests that concepts such as bravery or friendship encountered in *Macbeth* are universally understood, and can be easily transferred across history. Apart from this, in fact neither Felicity nor Marie draws overtly humanistic lessons from *Macbeth* (although they both draw heavily on the liberal humanist construct of 'character', see section on Textual Authority, above). Pip, on the other hand, consistently attempts to universalise situations in *Romeo and Juliet*, and emphasises apparently transhistorical moral lessons which might be drawn from the play's events. The absence of this approach in Felicity's and Marie's teaching may be down to the choice of play, since opportunities to draw modern parallels are much more obvious in a story that is traditionally presented as centring on adolescent lovers and gangs, rather than a murderous Scottish king and his wife. In the second of the observed year 10 lessons at Parkside, Pip sums up the moral of the *Romeo and Juliet* story as 'the whole tragedy...could all have been avoided, they could have maybe (.) been a bit kinder to each other, buried their differences and got along' (Pa R&J2, p.7). This observation suggests that the play documents a narrowly domestic slice of real life with situations that all of us can recognise. By doing this there is a tendency to normalise what are surely extraordinary events in the play which depend upon a specific social or cultural context. For example, when Mercutio dies, Pip assures her students that in immediately killing Tybalt Romeo reacts in a universally understandable way: '...he flips as most people would'. When the lovers meet at Capulet's party she suggests that the phenomenon of love at first sight is one that we can all recognise: 'I think we can imagine what that's like'. The overall appeal of the play is that it reflects our own lives: 'Everyone's been in love, everyone's been hurt, everyone's had an argument with somebody they're close to and so you can relate to these kind of things' (Pa R&J5, p.20). As I indicated earlier, one student's attempted objection that the events of the play hardly reflect 'real life' is swept aside and not allowed

to develop as an idea. Instead the play's 'contemporary relevance' is resolutely limited by the teacher to the level of a tragic love affair gone wrong, a situation which has universal resonance. To a certain extent this reading of the play is encouraged by Baz Luhrmann's film which blends semi-futuristic cityscapes with seventeenth century language, simultaneously managing to straddle violent reality and surrealist fantasy, old with new.

4.5 'Multi-Accentual' Shakespeare

So far, attention has been focused on Shakespeare as produced within a specific set of paradigms, reflecting what might be regarded as 'traditional' or authoritarian approaches to literature. I now want to turn to look at more socially oriented constructions of Shakespeare in the classroom, constructions which are more closely aligned to notions of readers as being socially, culturally and historically shaped themselves and where active meaning-making and cultural production are embraced as part of classroom practice. In categorising this view of Shakespeare I have borrowed the term 'multi-accentual' from Volosinov (1973), in order to suggest the complex and refracted nature of Shakespeare as a socially contested sign. Although Volosinov's focus is mostly on language, his theory of words as signs affords some insight into the way Shakespeare operates ideologically. According to Volosinov, signs are 'socially accentuated' (1973, p.22) in that they may be highly symbolic in one context but not in another; the way they are interpreted requires the active participation of the composer and reader, and depends particularly upon the social experience of the reader. Thus, a sign has 'like the social experience which is the principle of its formation, both dialectical and generative properties' (Williams, 1977, p.39). Crucially, for Volosinov (1973) the struggle for meaning is shaped by class:

> Existence reflected in the sign is not merely reflected but refracted...by an intersecting of differently oriented social interests within one and the same sign community, ie by the class struggle...this social multiaccentuality of the ideological sign is a very crucial aspect. By and large, it is thanks to this intersecting of accents that a sign maintains its vitality and dynamism and the

capacity for further development (p.23).

In the category of 'Multi-Accentual Shakespeare', I am looking for instances where teachers make space for students to debate meanings and to propose contradictory ideas about the plays under study; where there is an understanding that the students' own cultural knowledge and experiences contribute to the meaning-making processes. I am also interested in ways in which teachers and students not only place individual plays in their specific historical and political context, but also how they deal more broadly with Shakespeare's cultural baggage, investigating what Shakespeare has come to mean in cultural terms, even attempting to locate Shakespeare in popular culture. Each teacher promises to open up some kind of dialogic space within their lessons, but in actuality (with the exception of Beth) this happens infrequently or is rarely sustained.

4.5.1 Cultural production: It is noticeable that the two teachers at Eastgate School create more opportunities for their students to actively engage in ideas about the plays under study than do Pip and Felicity at Parkside. Beth, for instance, encourages her students to produce their own ideas five times in the opening 10 minutes of the first lesson I recorded; a key instruction from Beth is to 'imagine'; a recurring activity is to predict. As indicated earlier in this chapter, Marie invites students to work collaboratively in groups, working through improvisation, or creating their own dramatic texts out of lines taken from *Macbeth*.

A good example of the way in which Beth works comes during the lesson (HV1) where she explores Henry's reaction to the Dauphin's gift of tennis balls (Act 1, scene 2)[42]. As already indicated earlier, two students are invited to act out the presentation, followed by discussion of what the tennis balls might signify.

[42] Quoted earlier in this chapter, sequence 4(32)

Students are then asked to compose a couple of lines outlining their response in the role of Henry, with volunteers reading these out. Cremin *et al* (2006, p.286) suggest that writing in role 'is a means by which a learner can express a way of seeing, an opportunity to synthesise views and feelings and share them publicly'. Here, in this brief snapshot taken from a lesson, Beth's students' imaginative engagement is clear; their responses grasp the enormity of insulting a King, yet are at the same time expressed through the youthful discourse of contemporary north London. Importantly, the students' responses have not been shaped by a worksheet, nor are they echoing what their teacher has already told them, and this is discursively typical of this year 10 classroom. Also at Eastgate, Marie invites students to produce their own texts on a number of occasions, both individually and collaboratively. In the opening *Macbeth* lesson, the initial improvisation work serves as an invitation to the students to experiment with the text and as a reminder that their own ideas are valued. Improvisation provides a social and imaginative framework within which students bring together mental, physical and cultural activity, 'focused on the divergence of ideas' and with the potential to create 'multiple possibilities' (Cremin et al., 2006, p.289). Further into the play, Marie welcomes debate and an exchange of ideas. For example, as her students are completing a worksheet-based task in a later lesson, Marie encourages philosophical engagement with issues raised by the play. She takes up with the whole class a conversation she had been having with one group prompted by a student's question:

Sequence 4(49)

Teacher: Now, I've just been having a very interesting discussion with Jerome's group over here. He was asking me (2) [prompts Jerome to repeat question – inaudible]. Yes, he was asking me about Macbeth going to hell (.) If he already knows he's going to hell anyway, then why does he worry about it? And I said, 'what do you mean?' He says, 'Well, at the beginning of the play Macbeth has already killed lots of people, so he must already be going to hell'. But what's the difference between the people he killed at the beginning of the play, the ones he 'unseamed from the nave to the chaps' [T mimes disembowelling] and the king? What's the difference between these two types of killing? (2) Liz?
Liz: In one he's protecting his country [T: Right]. He's killing people not of God like the king is (.) er
Teacher: So, who are they, these people?

Liz: Soldiers, Norwegians
Teacher: Right, the enemy.
Chris: The thing is, Macbeth is protecting the king himself [T nods] what he's supposed to do
Teacher: OK [nods] so when he's faithful to the king, killing soldiers, he's protecting the king, God's choice (2) so killing's OK?
Ss: [various] Yes
Teacher: Well, is it? Because this is what Jerome was saying, is it OK for Macbeth to have killed the Norwegian soldiers? Is he going to hell anyway?
Josh: The thing is the Norwegian soldiers are trying to invade Scotland and to rule it. So, Macbeth is killing the Norwegian soldiers so they can't kill his king.

[Ea Mac3, pp.7-9]

Marie extends the debate by inviting considerations of British soldiers in warzones such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Unfortunately, this more free-flowing, open-ended response to moral and political issues potentially raised by the play is curtailed by the teacher after 4 or 5 minutes in order to record on the IWB quotations previously collected by the students. What is recorded (a chart of quotations to show 'how Macbeth manipulates the murderers') bears no relation to the latter discussion. Before moving on to the next stage of the lesson, the teacher's direction to stick the chart into students' exercise books serves as a blunt reminder that the key business of the lesson is to log 'points' in a format congenial to revision for the SATs test:

Sequence 4(50)

Teacher: OK, make sure you got all that entered on to your chart, please, because you're going to stick it into your books [T gets up, holding a bundle of glue sticks and proceeds to give them out]. 3 minutes to do this, because we've got something else we need to do before the end of the lesson (.) Good work, folks (4). Get it stuck in (2). Quick as you can (5). Right, this is all work on the scene you'll be tested on your SATs (2). The better you know it, the better position you'll be in when it comes to the exam.

[Ea Mac3, p.9]

In this way the glimpse that *Macbeth* might be open to interpretation, might trigger philosophical debate about war, nationalism and kingship is obliterated by the need to fulfil narrowly prescriptive assessment requirements. This is a pattern

that is repeated in Marie's lessons.

Over at Parkview, in an early *Macbeth* lesson Felicity tantalisingly describes the future unit of work to the class as 'our voyage through the play' (Pa Mac3, p.3). With this expression she suggests a joint, exploratory experience - one that rarely manifests itself in reality. In fact, it is hard to locate even isolated moments in Felicity's lessons when students are encouraged to debate or consider alternative points of view. During the seventh recorded lesson, when Felicity is setting a practice SATs essay, she points out that 'the question is phrased so you don't have to agree' (Ea Mac7, p.6) and she appears to encourage her students to take this uncertainty on board, within the parameters of the SATs essay format:

Sequence 4(51)

T: To what extent (.) so, how far (.) hmm, how far do you feel sympathy and what (.) after the question, what does it tell you to do? Amina? Hmm? <u>After</u> the question, what does it tell you to do?
Amina: Support
T: Yes, that's (.) supporting what you're saying. Explain why you think that. Not just saying what you think. "I feel sympathy for Macbeth because". That's really not a good enough answer. You've really got to develop the <u>why</u>. What there is in the play, not your reaction (3) necessarily. What there is in the <u>text</u> that tells you whether Shakespeare expects you to feel sympathy for Macbeth at this point in the play. [T looks at watch] Right (2) ... Outline 6 points (2) Don't worry about the evidence just yet. You've got to look at the scenes, you've got to decide whether or not you feel sympathy. And in your groups, just one more point I've got to make (.) the question is phrased so you don't have to agree. You do not have to feel sympathy and in your groups if some of you do and some of you don't that's fine.

[Pa Mac7, p.6]

In the ensuing whole-class feedback, however, Felicity closes this discursive space down as she edges her students towards a single reading of the text:

Sequence 4(52)

T: ...Macbeth kills Duncan but that's not the end of the story. So we don't feel sympathy for him because he's killed someone, OK? But it's not the end of the story because Amina's told us he's got Malcolm in the way as well.
Fatimah: Is it because, because he's killed Duncan, he's the king, obviously whoever killed Duncan wants to be king, yeah. Malcolm has to be scared, Malcolm runs away, yeah [inaudible]
T : Yes.
S: And after that he has to kill Banquo's children as well coz –
T: - Banquo's children? [waves her hand dismissively] No. That's taking us away from the text. You've got to stick to the text. So he's got to make Malcolm feel scared (.) so he runs away. What does that do with our feelings of sympathy for Macbeth?
Forhad: We don't have any
T: Go on Fatimah, back to you
Fatimah: We don't feel sympathy
T: We don't feel sympathy for him? Joynab?
Joynab: We don't feel sympathy for him.
T: At all?
Rashid: Except he's pressurised by his wife and by the witches
Aisha: Is his wife in it?
Rashid: Yes, coz his wife keeps saying to him, 'do it' (2) [inaudible]
T: Evidence?
Rashid: I don't know...
T: [Turns to another member of the same group] Sid, do you know? Evidence? Have you got the same point? [Sid looks down and shuffles his sheets]. Gurmeet? [Gurmeet also looks down and says nothing] It helps if you've got the sheet open [Gurmeet still says nothing]. Joynab?
...
T: We've got stuck on this one point. Amina, have you got another point? Perhaps from another scene.
Amina: Yes, I've got one.
T: Go on
Amina: [inaudible] He understands he's done something wrong.
T: So what does that make you feel about Macbeth at that point? Do you feel sympathy for him at this point?
Amina: Yes
T: Yes, "it's a sorry sight" shows he's done something wrong (.) so we <u>do</u> feel some sympathy for him (.) OK.

[Pa Mac7, pp.9-11]

Although students are ostensibly invited to give their personal opinion as to whether they feel sympathy for Macbeth at this point in the play, the teacher is only prepared to accept one response as the 'correct' one. She prompts the class

until one of them gives the desired answer, one that closely echoes traditional readings of Macbeth as a tragic hero, and this is where the discussion ends, marked by the teacher's emphatic statement ('so we do feel some sympathy for him') completed with a firm 'OK' acting as a marker to denote the end of this particular discursive episode.

On a number of occasions Pip encourages her students to regard *Romeo & Juliet* as open to a range of interpretations. For instance, whilst discussing an early scene in Act 1, Pip stresses that 'all ideas are good ideas at this stage' (R&J1, p.17); at other points she invites students to pose their own questions and throws questions back to the class for ideas. When one student challenges the assertion printed on a worksheet that the Nurse is 'rather stupid', Pip promises there will be room for some discussion later in the lesson: 'Ok we'll discuss that later because that might be an interesting point to bring up'. Indeed, she makes sure this is not forgotten when she begins to lead whole-class feed-back:

Sequence 4(53)

T: Right let's start with Juliet then. And again if there are any questions and I know there are a few (.) protests about the nurse, er, do feel free to ask those questions or make those points because it's about your interpretation as well (.) you don't just get told what's going on. Um, we'll start with Juliet. Who can give me the definition they thought matched with Juliet? OK, Balraj?

[Pa R&J2, p.6]

Yet the invitation to compare ideas about the Nurse fails to break out of the narrow confines of a liberal-humanist conception of character:

Sequence 4(54)

T: OK, Shola what were you saying about your problem with that description of the Nurse?
Shola: I don't think she's stupid
T: She's not really stupid. Perhaps what this description means is not that she's stupid as in not very clever, she is (.) what, what could we say about the Nurse?
S: A bit dopey
T: Bit dopey, yes. So, she's harmless, isn't she? As a character she's quite light-

> hearted, she's not really involved in any of the fighting, she's quite a comedy character, perhaps she's a bit silly rather than stupid. Maybe she's just a bit dopey.
>
> [Pa R&J2, p.7]

Earlier in the lesson, Shola's spontaneous reaction on receiving the sheet had been to challenge the received view, yet the ensuing discussion as shaped by the teacher is centred on semantics rather than larger questions about the process of reading and how (and why) different meanings are generated.

4.5.2 Socio-cultural role of readers

Popular film versions of Shakespeare plays on DVD have had the potential to blur the traditional dualism of page and stage and to radically change the relationship between students and the text, particularly in terms of access and accessibility. Whereas reading the printed text or attending a professional performance in the theatre tend to be associated with the leisure activities of a cultural elite, a recording on DVD can be watched anytime, anywhere, even on computer screen, transforming our sense of dramatic performance (Worthen, 2007). This is particularly true of Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet*, which with its high-tech digital editing techniques shifts the playtext into a multi-modal space more closely related to pop videos and electronic games geared for the teenage market. Pip's invitation for her class to approach the text of *Romeo and Juliet* through consideration of film conventions (in the opening lesson, as discussed earlier) helps make links between the students' cultural lives outside of school and within the classroom. Luhrmann's film text ensures a high level of engagement from the majority of the class, and as I mentioned earlier, a high degree of appreciation. Although Pip does not subsequently draw on students' explicit ability to read moving image text, and indeed attempts to maintain a precarious balance between film and printed text in the series of lessons that follow the opening lesson, the reading process for her students is nevertheless multi-layered. Pip continues to make links between students' own lives and the imagined world of

the film/play. There are numerous small moments, such as when she invites students to suggest a modern version for the thumb biting gesture in the first observed lesson; she picks up a student's idiomatic phrase 'squash the beef' (ie. settle the argument) arising out of contemporary youth culture, and applies it to the world of the play. At another point, when Pip is trying to collect together character descriptions on the board, a student suggests that either Benvolio or Tybalt 'looked like he was on drugs' (R&J1, p.14), an indication that although Pip resolutely refers to 'the play' in discussion, for some students it is the film text that they are cross-referencing.

Whereas Pip attempts to balance play and film text, Beth decentres the printed text and uses a film version of *Henry V* as her prime reference point during the sequence of lessons. This helps to shift the act of reading away from conventional parameters of literary meaning in terms of character, plot and feature spotting. The introductory activity in the first lesson I observed where students are asked to interpret a still image taken from the film, offers a good example. Students' impressions of Henry are not character-based in the conventionally idealist sense (ie., how he comes across *as a person*). Instead, students are asked to consider Henry's entrance to the stage as a piece of dramatic action. Students are positioned by Beth explicitly as 'viewers of Henry', a perspective that enables them to distance themselves from the stock literary response, and instead focus on the trappings of kingship and on this as a theatrical moment:

Sequence 4(55)

T: ...Other words people came up with? Richard?
Richard: Powerful
T: Brilliant! Why powerful?
Richard: Because he made an impression, he's coming out of darkness, the doors opening, it's lightening him up
Dexter: He's wearing a robe
T: He's wearing a what?
Dexter: [gestures with his hands] He's wearing all robes, like a cape –
S: [interrupting, humorous tone] Cape! He's not Superman, you know!
Dexter: [deliberately finishing what he was saying] they make him look scary

Ss: [several start to shout out]
T: [amused] Because robes are always scary? [she gestures next student] OK, guys! Ade, what else have you got, please?
Ade: I just put powerful and scary
T: Powerful and scary. OK. Bode, what did you put?
Bode: I put dark, manly figure
T: Brilliant, yep, OK. Cem?
Cem: The light's on him, it means God's on his side
T: Fantastic. I really like that: the light's on him so God's on his side. I like that one a lot. OK, Karen.
Karen: Secrecy because he's in shadow
T: Brilliant, secrecy, I like that. [A few Ss call out] No, don't call out! We need to hear comments. Yeah, Bode?
Bode: Shady
T: Why shady?
Bode: Because you can't really see his face, yeah. You can only see bits where the light comes in

[Ea HV1, pp.3-4]

By working multi-modally, students are co-constructing an initial reading of Henry which, it seems to me, begins to capture the ambiguities inherent in Shakespeare's king figure, ambiguities that help explain the variant (and sometimes contradictory) readings underlying different productions of the play (for example, see Rabkin, 2004). Later in the lesson, in outlining the reasons for going to war, Beth is able to explicitly build on Cem's comment about God being on Henry's side, developing a sense that interpretation in this classroom is produced dialogically out of interaction between all parties. Although this level of collaboration is not sustained throughout all of Beth's lessons, reading in this year 10 classroom is generally a collaborative exercise involving, for example, the sharing of predictions, role play and group discussion. It is interesting that, on watching the concluding scenes of the film (in the fourth observed lesson), whereas one unidentified student shouts, 'Brilliant!', Ade cries out in a tone of genuine exasperation: 'Oh, ho! So, if there's peace at the end, what's the use of that flipping war?' and returns to this theme after some whole-class discussion about Henry's marriage to Katherine: 'So, basically they fought for nothing, yeah?' For Ade at least, there is no comfortable comic resolution to the play as suggested

by conventional readings; for him the romanticised ending is trite in the face of such loss of life.

The *Henry V* coursework essay itself is phrased in such a way as to encourage debate: 'In your view, how is war presented...?' In preparation for the coursework essay, students work firstly in pairs using some prompts to shape their responses, then they are asked to swap over their sheets and share their ideas. Reading is conceived here as a social activity, where on the face of it different reading practices are acknowledged, even if in its execution this is highly contradictory as I indicated earlier.

In both Beth's and Marie's classrooms role plays and improvisation form part of this reading process, with students drawing on their own experiences and cultural knowledge within the collaborative framework of drama. Drama provides a socio-cultural space within which students are able to make connections between unofficial knowledge and official school knowledge, as for example when Marie's year 9 students create improvisations out of their shared knowledge of playground discourse, soap opera and television adverts in a lesson that introduces the class to *Macbeth* (Ea Mac1) through 'themes'. Students' own cultural lives naturally form a reference point in Beth's classroom. For instance, when considering what a leader might say to rally their troops, Kadife asks if people living in Britain 'in them days, were they all Christians?'. Cem pursues this line of thought and asks Beth what would have happened in Henry's day to someone who was not a Christian. Later, adopting the role of leader, Unur incorporates the words, 'Do it in the name of Allah' into his motivational speech. These students are simultaneously behaving as social actors and dramatic actors (Franks, 1996; Neelands, 2009), a fusion which I would argue bridges the gap between the Shakespeare text and students' own cultural understandings. The essentially collaborative nature of classroom drama encourages the production of meaning through the interplay of 'many voices', enabling students to imagine and inhabit other selves, other possible worlds (Yandell, 2007).

4.5.3 Shakespeare as culturally constructed

In their separate interviews, each teacher states unequivocally that Shakespeare should be a part of the National Curriculum. As Marie says, Shakespeare should be taught because it is 'brilliant, it's poetic, it's beautiful, it's exciting, it's fun...a really important part of reading and learning and English and language', a sentiment echoed by the other teachers. In Pip's view, 'it is classic English Literature' and 'a lot would be taken away from a child's education...if they didn't do at least one Shakespeare text'. Beth echoes this view and develops it further:

> **Beth:** ...I think students should have a sense that Shakespeare is important. Which I don't think means they should therefore think Shakespeare is beyond criticism or that Shakespeare can't be challenged or there aren't different viewpoints and other good writers around, but I think to actually deny students the experience of Shakespeare is (.) I think you are actually depriving them of something quite important, in the sense that it represents a massive, a massive literary achievement basically and that certainly I think, you know, some of the best dramatic experiences of my life, some of the best performances I have ever seen in the theatre have been the incredibly brilliant productions of certain Shakespeare plays because I think they still (.) I think it's that whole thing about although they were written 400 years ago they still address relevant concerns.

In class, however, none of the teachers explicitly engage their students in considerations of Shakespeare's cultural value, apart from Pip's illusory invitation, as previously discussed. Both Beth and Felicity raise the issue of the way Shakespeare might have adapted his historical sources, but Felicity's approach, as described earlier, is relentlessly monologic. Beth is alone in regarding the conditions of production as an important facet of understanding a piece of literature. In the fourth lesson to be observed, the students conclude watching the film with a discussion about what aspects of the play may have been written to flatter the monarch:

> ***Sequence 4(56)***
>
> **T:** The actual historical events in Henry V took place in 1415, Shakespeare wrote this play in 1599 when Elizabeth I was queen. Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry VIII, yeah? So he wrote it almost 250 years after the events took place, OK?

And he changed quite a lot, added things, took things away and all the rest of it. So, first of all, what bits of it do you think are actual fact?
Dexter: He married that French chick
Ade: He added things to make it more exciting, innit?
T: Exactly. What other things do you think in the play are fact?
Unur: War. The number of people that died
Dexter: His friends! His friends!
S: Yeah, they betrayed him
T:....yeah, there was a plot against him. It's different though and not just about money as it is in the play
...
T: ...the siege of Harfleur. What might have been changed in the play? What does Henry do at the end of that scene? After the governor has surrendered, what does he, Henry, er, what does Shakespeare have him do?
S: It's about killing the children and stuff, innit?
T: ...he says, if you give up now we won't harm anyone, we won't take anything, etc. It wasn't unfortunately true. They did sack the town, they killed and raped people. ..

[Ea HV4, p.2 of partial transcript]

In the next lesson (HV5) when the class once again watched the Harfleur scenes on film there is an audible gasp from a large number of students when they catch the actual words that Henry uses to threaten the Governor of Harfleur:

Your naked infants spitted upon pikes
Whiles the mad mothers with their howls confused
Do break the clouds... (*Henry V*, 3. 4. 38-40)

This spontaneous reaction suggests that connections are being made within and across the social space of this classroom. The complexity of the figure that is Henry, bound up with political and historical considerations, may be glimpsed within the brief but skilful way Beth shapes the students' encounter with this play. During a short whole-class episode Beth points out ways in which Shakespeare's version of Henry V differs from historical evidence. Owsun immediately responds that Shakespeare gives the impression that Henry 'was the best king of England'. Putting aside the problematic question as to whether Owsun is referring to 'Henry' as constructed by Shakespeare or by Branagh, his contribution is accepted without

establishing a 'correct' answer. This discussion is picked up again in the last observed lesson, when Beth is setting up the coursework essay, and she suggests students should make reference to the way Shakespeare 'twists the truth'. Importantly, the actual essay title set by Beth invites students to interpret the way war is presented in the Harfleur scenes for themselves, and crucially avoids suggesting that whatever 'meaning' Shakespeare apparently had in mind at the point of writing can somehow be divined by readers now[43].

4.5.4 Scripts and counter-scripts: moments of resistance

I have already indicated how a deficit view of students' cultural knowledge shapes the way Felicity constructs Shakespeare in her introductory lessons, where students' prior knowledge is not only refracted through a reductive paradigm but also negatively compared with the teacher's superior knowledge. It is not surprising, therefore, that even in a school like Parkside, where student behaviour is almost uniformly calm and compliant, Felicity's students do occasionally mount challenges, manifested through widespread disengagement (both physically and orally realised[44]), localised pockets of restlessness, and even direct vocal challenges. Gutierrez *et al* (1995) have investigated ways in which the 'official' script of the classroom may be undermined by students' potentially subversive 'counterscript'. Such a process is particularly evident in classrooms where a teacher pursues what the researchers describe as a rigidly monologic discourse, where 'the inscribed knowledge of the teacher and classroom regularly displaces the local and culturally varied knowledge of the students' (Gutierrez et al., 1995, p.447). For Gutierrez and her colleagues, the classroom is best regarded as a site informed by institutional procedures, in which 'multiple, simultaneous social spaces' are constructed 'through the social practices of everyday activity' (1995,

[43] For example, a more common form of the essay title might have been: 'How does Shakespeare present war in the Harfleur scenes of the play?'

[44] Physical expressions of student disengagement are most commonly manifested as laying heads down on the tables, leaning backwards on chairs with gaze averted from the teacher or the board, doodling on books or paper; orally, students frequently engage in 'stage yawns' during whole-class episodes of teaching.

p.449). According to Gutierrez's research, students' discursive challenges more often than not run parallel with the teacher's 'script' rather than posing a counter hegemonic 'script' that threatens to radically alter the asymmetrical balance of discursive power (also see Rampton, 2006). However, at moments when these two scripts intersect Gutierrez et al locate the potential for a radically different, 'dialogic' form of classroom interaction.

I want to take a look at two moments from the third lesson I observed in Felicity's classroom where students' 'counterscripts' challenge but do not ultimately threaten the discursive balance. Firstly, a moment from the beginning of the lesson when Felicity is recapping information she had previously given the students:

Sequence 4(57)

T: I started telling you – oh, back before the holidays – I started telling you about Macbeth as a character, and we talked about whether it was fact or fiction. Whether it was based on fact or fiction (.) Can you remember, can anyone remember me mentioning it...anyone got any ideas? Is it pure fiction or not?
S: Yeah
T: Pure fiction. Pure fiction? (.) Is that the general feeling? (.) Be easier if we had the traffic lights cards out, wouldn't it? Quickly. Is it pure fiction, Jimmy?
Jimmy: No
T: Why not?
Jimmy: It's a guess.
T: It's a guess. OK. An educated guess. Why's it a guess?
Jimmy: [deliberate tone] Because you asked me to [some laughter from other Ss]
T: [coldly] And?
Jimmy: I think… [pause]
T: Go on, interpret the question.
Jimmy: I think it's based on a true story, but he's changed it a bit.

[Pa Mac3, pp.3-4]

Initially, both the unidentified student who first answers and Jimmy play out their assigned classroom roles within the naturalised 'Initiation-Response-Feedback' ritual (Edwards and Mercer, 1987), where the teacher is solely responsible for constructing culturally official knowledge and the students are positioned as

ignorant, relegated to playing guessing-games within the teacher's script. However, Jimmy's explanation that he has simply made a guess based on the fact that the teacher continued to seek an alternative yes-or-no answer to the one provided by the first student, breaks the illusion of knowledge sharing and exposes the empty ritual that had been partially concealed by the teacher's invitation to share 'ideas'. That this is recognised by students is evidenced by the laughter, a pivotal 'unscripted' moment in this exchange. But Jimmy almost immediately retreats back to the comfort of the routinised dominant teacher script and once more adopts a compliant role, delivering for the teacher an acceptably worded answer, and providing her with a cue to commence a more detailed monologue about the historical Macbeth during which students within the camera shot put their heads down onto their desks, a passive physical display of disengagement.

At another point in this same lesson, Felicity is taking the students through a rehearsed reading of the opening scene of *Macbeth* for the fifth time.

Sequence 4(58)

T: [T gestures for silence. Raises voice] Right! (.) Ssh. And stop. (4) Let's see (5) Right, I'm not having you in different groups, now you've all practised it we're going to read it again
[Various students make sounds of dismay]
T: Just once more. And then we'll see if we can actually get that, that flow to the words. So (.) I'm not going to say what witch, you're just going to be speakers one, two, three, take it in order. Jimmy, Billy (.) Jimmy, you're one, Billy's two and Rashid you're three.
[Students muttering]
T: And I want it loud. In fact I want you to stand up.
Jimmy: Stand?
Rashid: What's the point of this?
T: Because I asked you to! Stand up!
Rashid: [Mocking tone] Oh, don't undermine Miss's authority [laughs]
[Laughter from other students]
T: [Raises voice] OK! (.) Maybe you want to come out here? [gestures front of room]
Billy: Oh no, miss.
Rashid: I'm OK here.

> **T:** Well come round here [indicates sides of room near where they are sitting], so you're standing facing into the room. Come over here, Rashid. Come over here [gestures] come over here, so you're talking across the room. [Rashid very slowly moves a step or two in the indicated direction] OK!
> **Jimmy:** Shall we start, miss? [T nods]
>
> [Pa mac3, pp.16-17]

It hardly goes without saying that the three boys' read-through is not considered a success by the teacher, and attracts laughter from other students. What is more remarkable is that the whole pointlessness of this exercise in cultural dominance is once again exposed by students operating outside of the teacher's script, and that the moment is quickly contained, with the teacher's cultural authority once again restored.

During my interviews, both Pip and Beth highlighted drama-based activities as examples of moments in the classroom which they felt had worked well for them. Pip describes her opening lesson (not observed by me) in which she had used an idea taken from *Teaching Shakespeare* (Gibson, 1998) covering the whole plot of Romeo & Juliet in 10 lines. 'It was a really enjoyable lesson', she comments, partly due to the fact 'it woke them up to what we were going to be doing...because they think it's going to be so boring... it was just fun, a lively atmosphere in the classroom and I liked that'.

Beth recounts her experience at a 'fantastic' day's INSET run by the RSC, and how she had gained the confidence from that to set up the 'tennis balls' scene from *Henry V* (as discussed above). For Beth, it is important to emphasise the fact that Shakespeare is drama, produced collaboratively 'by a company of actors...working out how they were going to present this play' and not a text 'about a single heroic figure'. She is complimentary about the Cambridge Schools editions in the way they provide helpful ideas for imaginative drama-based activities, but also critical of the majority of the titles for not being coherently theorised in terms of the social and political context of Shakespeare.

Like Beth, Marie is also keen that her pupils 'understand that this is not something actually that we are supposed to be sitting in a classroom reading, this is something you see on stage...', and she goes on to make the point that apart from watching a film version, the closest most pupils will get to a theatrical experience is classroom drama.

It is interesting that both Marie and Felicity make direct reference to issues of pupil behaviour when considering classroom drama, and Pip makes a similar point indirectly. This teacherly concern is likewise marked in the initial testimonies of teachers participating in RSC/Warwick action research projects (Irish, 2008). Felicity explains that the absence of drama activities in her teaching of *Macbeth* is because of the 'issues' she has with the group, and their lack of motivation to read complex texts such as Shakespeare. Marie suggests that the reason she used so much drama in her teaching is because of her relationship with the class:

> **Marie:** If it was a more difficult class or a class I struggled with more in terms of classroom management then I would probably use a lot less drama...

In contrast, Beth seems to suggest that she was able to keep her volatile year 10 class interested and motivated when using interactive methods, but that the pupils lost interest when she attempted to do more 'traditional' tasks such as close language work:

> **Beth:** ...it's tricky because I think (.) I know one lesson that probably worked the least well one of the ones that you saw, was when they had to annotate a speech, which they didn't do particularly badly but they didn't do or to the same sort of degree of enthusiasm that I think they did some of the other things with. And I am not quite sure how you get round that because I think it's (.) there are times when I think you do want students to look closely at the language and I am not quite sure how you get round the (.) do you know what I mean? You can get to speak it and do it and whatever but when you want to get that degree of analysis which you certainly need in a GCSE coursework essay, for example, and you would want students to do because it's, because you want to look at the language and because it's good preparation for A level for example, I'm not quite sure I got there with that because I think they got quite bored. It was meant to be quite a kind of

> structured way of picking out phrases and getting past the sort of density of the language which is often what alarms students about Shakespeare.

Beth here explicitly alludes to tensions between 'active' Shakespeare and preparing students for formal assessment, tensions which are implicit in so much of the classroom data I have been analysing in this chapter, and which sometimes emerge in a way that appears abrupt and destabilising of the classroom dynamic. In the next chapter I want to explore the Shakespeare units of work from the students' perspective, drawing on group interview, questionnaire and written essay data.

CHAPTER 5
MAKING SENSE OF SHAKESPEARE?

In the preceding chapter analysis of the classroom data has tended to focus on the way teachers mediate the specific text under study, and the spontaneous responses made by students during class activities. In this Chapter I want to turn attention to the readers themselves and the way they respond more holistically to the experience of reading a Shakespeare text at the end of the unit of work, through spoken reflections and through more formally constructed written essays (practice SATs questions from both year 9 classes and GCSE coursework essays from the year 10s).

5.1 Student interviews

As indicated in Chapter 3, thirty-three students from the four classes under observation were interviewed in eight separate groups. Students were selected initially in conversation with the relevant class teacher with reference to background data supplied by the school and my own classroom observations, with the intention of forming small groups which were representative of the class as a whole (based on sex, ethnicity, prior attainment and levels of participation). However, pupil absence on the days allotted to interviews meant that the teacher had to make rapid substitutions. Overall, though, a spread of attainment levels, gender and ethnicity has been maintained. See Tables 5a and 5b (below) for an overview of the students who were interviewed. The interviews took place after students had completed the Shakespeare unit of work, and had submitted their coursework essays (year 10) or sat their National Curriculum test (year 9). This meant that the interviews gave me a chance to invite the students to review the method of assessment and the lessons too.

Table 5a: year 9 students selected for interview

Group	Student	gender	ethnicity	KS2 English SATs level
9Ea *group a*	Annie	f	White UK	5
	Tunde	m	Black African	3
	Meera	f	Indian	5
	Mehmet	m	Kurdish	2
9Ea *group b*	Carlos	m	Columbian	6 months in UK
	Dijean	m	Black Caribbean	4
	Chris	m	White UK	5 (G&T)
	Yasmin	f	Turkish	3
9Pa *group a*	Rashid	m	Pakistani	4
	Sid	m	White UK	4
	Fatimah	f	Pakistani	3
	Madhur	f	Indian	4
9Pa *group b*	Joynab	f	'other Asian'	4
	Amina	f	Bangladeshi	4
	Emma	f	White UK	4
	Billy	m	White/Asian	3

Table 5b: year 10 students selected for interview

Group	Student	gender	ethnicity	KS3 English SATs level
10Ea *group a*	Bode	m	Black African	5
	Graham	m	White UK	6 (G&T)
	Richard	m	White UK	6
	Derya	f	Turkish	4
	Aysu	f	Turkish	5
10Ea *group b*	Owsun	m	Black African	5
	Joshua	m	Black Caribbean	4
	Chaz	m	White UK	-
	Karen	f	White UK	6
10Pa *group a*	Abeola	f	Black African	5
	Sue	f	White UK	6
	Ezekiel	m	Black Caribbean	6
	Gurjal	m	Indian	5
10Pa *group b*	Asha	f	Pakistani	6
	Meera	f	Indian	6
	Joe	m	White UK	6
	Ben	m	White UK	5

The interview question that gained the greatest unanimity of response was asking students to nominate their 'best Shakespeare lessons'. Without exception all four groups talk enthusiastically about particular drama-based activities, and articulate their preferences in terms of being more engaged in the learning, or feeling that drama work helps support understanding of plot and characters, a finding supported by student survey results used to evaluate the RSC's Learning and Performance Network programme (Galloway and Strand, 2010). Students also highly rated the chance to watch a performance, whether on film or delivered by a visiting Theatre-in Education group. As I discuss below, however, film's power to engage is not automatic: specific films appear to attract students' attention better than others, and some students discuss the fragmenting effect of watching a film version over a number of lessons. Despite appreciating a drama-based approach, what is nevertheless apparent from the broader discussions is that these students primarily construct specific Shakespeare plays as narrative texts, albeit texts composed in alienating language.

Predictably, approximately half of the students interviewed agreed with the statement that they found Shakespeare to be boring, with over half stating that they would not want to read or watch another play. This was most marked with the year 9 interviewees, fresh from their SATs study. None of the year 9 students gave an unqualified yes to the proposal to cover another play in class – ten out of 16 gave a definite no, with four or five suggesting that it would depend upon the actual play and how it was taught. This reluctance to encounter Shakespeare again was only slightly less marked with the year 10s – and raises issues with the purpose of National Curriculum Shakespeare, a question I discuss in the final Chapter.

5.1.1 Shakespeare constructed as pre-packaged knowledge

As outlined in the previous chapter, the dominant classroom discourse in the lessons I observed is of a Shakespeare reduced to facts, charts and essay

frameworks. Not surprisingly, this is reflected in the students' interview comments. Students clearly regard Shakespeare as an 'exam text' requiring mediation by a teacher or by the editor of a school edition. So, at various points individuals make comments such as Abeola's:

> ..all of us when we were reading it in class, if we didn't have Miss to like help us read between the lines then none of us would have actually understood half of it and we would have found it boring anyway [Pa 10a][45]

In agreeing that Shakespeare is boring, Meetal goes on to pinpoint language as the hardest obstacle, but is thankful that 'in the books it gives the definitions of words so it makes it easier' [Pa 10b]. In fact many students appear to believe that the reason that Shakespeare is in the National Curriculum, is because it represents the perfect exam text: so, according to Sid, 'Shakespeare's got loads of, lots of types of different styles of writing and types of grammar' [Pa 9a]; or according to Graham's functional take on it:

> Well, the government obviously has the opinion that Shakespeare is one of the best ones, wrote some of the best works so is probably the best English to examine on because it gives everything that needs to be examined (.) well, I can't really explain it (2) so it generally, he's probably easy to mark because he make his points clear [Ea 10a].

Abeola asks resignedly, 'If we didn't have Shakespeare [in the National Curriculum] what other writer would they give us?' [Pa 10a]. Gurjal agrees, adding that the reason Shakespeare is compulsory is because it is so much harder than other writers.

[45] Indicates the group in which the particular student was interviewed. Abeola was in the second of the year 10 Parkside groups.

A number of students comment that, whilst the story of a particular play was quite good, the exam regime rendered the whole reading process boring. For example, here are two year 9 students at Eastgate discussing *Macbeth*:

> **Annie:** Yeah, there were a few good bits. Yeah, I do think you need to know the beginning bit, about how he meets the witches and how they trick him, and how that changes, no not changes, how you know how that's made him want to become King, and why he's doing it.
> **Meera:** But we spent so much time on it, by the end it was a bit of a drag, coz we had to do all timed essays, and stuff like that.
> **Annie:** Yeah.
> **Meera:** You just knew it well enough, but we have to go on to it so many times.

What is striking about Annie and Meera's comments is that they are both keen, high achieving students who generally make very positive contributions both in lessons and in interview, yet even for them the routinised test-oriented lessons became 'a bit of a drag'. Other students make similar comments, for instance, Bode [Ea 10a] says that going over long speeches gets boring; Mehmet [Ea 9] found with *Macbeth* that 'you just have to read, too long, it's too long'. This is a sentiment shared by other year 9 students:

> **Chris:** Going over those scenes… it got boring
> **Dijean:** Revising. That just got [laughs]. I don't know anyone who liked that [all laugh].
> **JC:** There was a sharp intake of breath, there, Chris? You agreed with that comment, did you?
> **Chris:** [laughing] yeah, I er made a very poor attempt at, at revision [unclear]
> **JC:** Carlos, Yasmin? Worst bits of doing *Macbeth*?
> **Carlos:** Too much.
>
> [Ea 9b]

When it comes to assessment, students generally appear to have a functional view of whatever play they have studied. When the year 9 students are reminded of the SATs essay paper they had recently taken[46] and asked what they thought the

[46] The actual SATs question on *Macbeth* for that year asked: 'In these extracts how does Macbeth's language show that he feels afraid, but is determined to keep his power?'

examiners were looking for, answers tend to focus on technical detail rather than interpretation of the play (or, even of the three set scenes). Thus, Amina from one of the Parkside groups immediately suggests, 'Paragraphs and sentence structure', with Emma contributing, 'Big long words' [Pa 9b]. Over at Eastgate, Annie suggests that sentence structure is important; while Meera asks, with some note of concern, 'Is there a right or wrong answer to this question?'; Carlos suggests that examiners want to see 'explaining' and Chris adds, 'Make your points PEE' (point, example, explanation), both students referring to the widespread routinised way of teaching essay-writing skills arising out of the national Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy, which tends to prioritise structure over the creation of ideas (Ellis, 2005). Students from Parkside also make reference to 'points, quotes, explanation'. Not a single student suggests that personal response or interpretation is an aspect of the exercise which will garner marks. Instead, there is a strong suggestion that, to do well, regurgitation of teacher-mediated, classroom-generated notes is the object of the exercise:

> **JC:** How did you find the question itself? Did it -?
> **Annie:** - I [pauses]
> **JC:** Is it a difficult question?
> **Meera:** Some people did but we'd done power.
> **Tunde:** It wasn't a difficult question coz we'd [pause]
> **JC:** Because you'd done the practice?
> [several: yeah]
> **Tunde:** We learned a lot on power in class, so yeah
> [Ea 9a]

Dijean, from the second Eastgate group interview, appears to echo this sentiment when he says, 'We done essays and an essay about power and Macbeth and how power showed in these scenes and who has the power in these scenes and this was kind of like the same thing' [Ea 9b]. In effect, this is foregrounding the practice essays as texts rather than *Macbeth*.

In fact, as seen from classroom data in the previous chapter, the mechanical grip of the 'PEE' approach to essay writing extends to year 10 students producing

coursework essays too, as picked up by Eastgate students in the following interview exchange:

> **JC:** What about the coursework. What do you think Ms Jones was looking for in the piece of coursework you've just been writing on *Henry V*?
> **Bode:** Like lots of elaboration.
> **JC:** Elaboration – what do you mean by that?
> **Bode:** Sort of, try not to tell the story. Sort of explain how he uses the language to say about war.
> **JC:** So, try not to tell the story and try to unpick the language, how things have been said?
> **Richard:** And to quote things that were actually said.
> **JC:** Right, to quote accurately. Yep, anything else do you think she is looking for?
> **Bode:** Spelling, punctuation.
> **JC:** OK, spelling and punctuation.
> **Richard:** Essay-writing skills, probably. Because it's quite long.
> **JC:** What do you mean by easy-writing skills? What kind of things do you mean by that?
> **Graham:** Write a really long thing without making it really boring, keeping an eye on that kind of thing, but also there's point, explanation and I can't think what it was.
> **Richard:** Point, example, explanation.
> **JC:** PEE?
> **Richard:** Yes.
>
> [Ea 10a]

Routine and technical aspects of essay writing are quickly foregrounded following vague references to 'explain how he (Shakespeare? Henry V?) uses the language' and the importance of quotations. Again, what appears to be absent from the students' consciousness is any sense of 'reader response', that an essay might involve you as the reader/audience collaboratively or individually wrestling with a range of possible meanings, making personal connections, or even reflecting upon the dramatic nature of the three scenes under scrutiny.

Linked to the way students conceive of constructing a written response is, I think, the overall sense they gained of the whole play under study. A number of

students speak about the fragmentary nature of their Shakespeare study. Here, for instance, are Richard, Bode and Graham articulating their feelings about the unit of work on *Henry V*:

> **Richard:** ...I felt quite rushed because we really did rush reading the book and we kind of like did a bit of work and then we watched the film and it was like quite rushed as I said.
> **JC:** You've only got a short amount of time to do it in, haven't you? And finish the coursework.
> **Bode:** For *Richard III* we had to look at the whole movie (.) as a whole but for *Henry III*, er, fifth [laughs] we only had to look at three scenes in particular, so I think it was a bit rushed. We only looked at three scenes [unclear]
> **Graham:** I think that if we had read the whole book, then looked back at the three scenes we would have understood the three scenes much better...with *Henry* we just got to look at certain bits they wanted us to study I think, so it was a bit patchy and we weren't really sure of the background.
>
> [Ea 10a]

Despite watching the whole of the Branagh film version, these students have still come away from the experience with a patchy view of the play. Later in the same interview they comment further about the experience of watching the film in class:

> **JC:** What about watching the film?
> **Graham:** The film was alright. I mean the film wasn't that clear when we were watching it. I mean, I watched it at home on DVD and you didn't really get the full effects of it at school, I didn't think.
> **JC:** What's the difference then between watching it at home and watching it at school?
> **Graham:** Well, basically it was because not a hundred per cent of the people were focused in the class, people were talking.
> **JC:** So, because of that it takes your attention away from the film?
> **Graham:** Yeah, you don't take in as much as when you're at home watching it, when you get the storyline in your head. So I could relax more –
> **Richard:** - Yeah.
> **Bode:** I'm not really bothered by people talking, I can still concentrate but the thing about watching the movie was that because we watch a little bit and then stop and then watch some

more tomorrow, you kind of lose what you have gathered up all the information and you have to start fresh, sort of.

[Ea 10a]

As discussed in the last chapter, Beth was the only teacher to break up the viewing of the film version so that it spanned a number of lessons and, though viewed sequentially, it was interwoven with drama-based activities, some discussion and a small amount of text-focused work. When setting the coursework essay Beth repeated the viewing of the three selected scenes. Yet the speed of unit completion demanded by crowded GCSE courses has left these students with a fragmentary view of the play and a lingering sense of dissatisfaction. The integration of film and classroom activities across the unit of work has, it seems, denied them the experience of appreciating the play as a dramatic whole, the authentic experience of an audience watching a complete performance, what Rosenblatt (1994, p.70) refers to as 'the lived-through evocation of the work'. The other Eastgate year 10 interview group, whilst saying less about this aspect of their lessons, nevertheless also felt that they had been rushed and that they had gained a better understanding of their SATs play, *Macbeth*, the previous year, partly because, as Karen says, 'We had more lessons on what it actually meant' and Joshua adds, 'We had a whole year of it'.

Although these year 10 students appear to reflect relatively positively on their previous SATs play experiences, the year 9 students interviewed suggest that the set scenes approach of SATs has left them also with a fragmentary view of the play. Indeed, a number of students acknowledge that the test really only demands some knowledge of the set scenes and little else:

JC: So, do you think, er, in order to answer that question, you need to know the whole story of *Macbeth*, or just the set scenes?
Tunde: The set scenes, really.
Annie: You need to know what went just before the set scene and just after, not all of it, just the scenes around it, the pages before, just so

you know where it is, where you caught up from and where you left off.
Meera: You just need to know what the characters are like, like Lady Macbeth, she's very thorough, like she's….
Annie: I think you do need to understand how the characters got into that position.
JC: How many of you, when you went into the exam, knew the story of *Macbeth* really well?
Meera: I thought I did…
Annie: I thought I knew what we needed to know. There's a certain point where I did not know what happened in the rest of the play.
Meera: Yeah.

[Ea 9a]

Annie and Meera then try to remember what Tunde calls the 'main bits' of the play before the set scenes, but all they manage is a rather sketchy allusion to two of the witches' scenes. The Parkside year 9 students reflect a similar fragmented sense of *Macbeth*. Emma's comment, coming towards the end of the interview, amounts to a rather damning indictment of this way of assessing students' understanding of Shakespeare, focusing on three set scenes:

> I thought, I thought going into the exam we'd have to know the play, have to have studied the scenes, but say if you were someone who'd never seen the play before, understood their own language or whatever, they would sit down and write an answer to this question because you've got the scenes there, you've got the question in front of you and really you don't need anything else.
>
> [Pa 9b]

Emma is possibly overstating her case, but surely there is a grain of truth where students see the key test skills required to be mainly technical (adhering to the PEE writing template), and an answer may be constructed out of very few scraps of playtext (which, after all, are printed alongside the exam paper). Put together, these students' comments regarding assessment do not suggest any genuine intellectual, imaginative or emotional engagement with the play.

Unsurprisingly, in these circumstances very few of the students interviewed said they would want to study another Shakespeare play. Year 9s at Parkside are the most united in their rejection of further Shakespeare study:

> **JC:** If you were able next year to do a GCSE that didn't have any Shakespeare in it, but you still get your full GCSE at all grades, or you could opt to do a GCSE with Shakespeare which would you do?
> **Amina:** Without.
> **Joynab:** Without.
> **Emma:** [laughs] Without!
> **Billy:** Without, without!
> **JC:** All four of you [chorus: yeah]. Why? A couple of you have just been telling me how useful it is to know it in later life.
> **Joynab:** It is, but we're kind of not ready.
> **Amina:** It's very hard, and that might be the reason we might fail our GCSE because Shakespeare's hard.
> **Emma:** Yes, it's hard.
> **JC:** Hmm, so you think it's one of the hardest things that you do? [chorus: yeah] Yeah, yeah, I understand that.
> **Billy:** Miss, is there any chance of us not having to take Shakespeare this next year?
>
> [Pa 9b]

What appears to be a key factor in these four Parkside students' wish to avoid further Shakespeare is the level of difficulty they believe it represents, and their own lack of confidence in measuring up to the task, an impression they have taken away from their SATs study of *Macbeth*. And this lack of intellectual confidence is not confined to Parkside year 9s. Just as one of the year 10 Eastgate interviews had finished and students were gathering their bags to move on to their next lesson, Bode hung back to ask me with a note of anxiety in his voice, 'Do we have to do any more Shakespeare?' Once he heard from me that would only be if he opted for AS English in the sixth form, he uttered a loud 'Phew'.

Within the main body of the interviews, students range from blunt rejection ('it's boring') to more thoughtfully argued rationales for reduced compulsory Shakespeare. For instance, Emma and Amina (year 9 Parkside) argue that they should cover a broad range of authors, and that now Shakespeare has been

covered for SATs, their GCSE course should offer a fresh experience. Other reasons for not including compulsory Shakespeare in GCSE specifications range from Gurjal's comment, 'It's too hard for us', to Ezekiel's reasoning that the language is too often a barrier to enjoying the 'quite twisty' stories. Individual students who are happy to study another play offer a number of different reasons. Firstly, here is Ben from Parkside, who suggests that the main attractions lie in studying language change:

> **JC:** Ben, you were pretty clear about [wanting to read more Shakespeare], that you would want to, why?
> **Ben:** Erm, coz I quite like the old language which is used. I think it adds a whole new twist (.) that kind of thing. And I think it's more (.) I dunno, I prefer the old language than, er, maybe new language. And, I dunno, I just find it quite interesting, I find it , I think he's an interesting person as well. So, er, yeah, I can't really explain why. I've only read two of them. But, I dunno..
> **JC:** Enough to make you interested to read some more?
> **Ben:** Yeah.
> **JC:** And would you want to do that on your own, or to do that as part of the course?
> **Ben:** Probably on my own...
> **JC:** Right? You're up for the challenge of that?
> **Ben:** Yeah – there's a dictionary as well [laughs] so [others laugh]
> **JC:** And film versions as well, aren't there -
> **Ben:** - Yeah, yeah, yeah –
>
> [Pa 10a]

Not only is it an independent and solitary model of reading that Ben appears to have in mind, but he appears to consider the most effective tool to make sense of a Shakespeare text as being a dictionary, blurring any distinction between interpretation and translation.

Joe, also from Parkside, is happy to read more Shakespeare only if students have a choice over the precise title to be studied, '...like Macbeth...because some are more interesting than others' [Pa 10b], a sentiment shared by students at Eastgate who are keen to read *Romeo and Juliet* having seen the Baz Luhrmann film outside

of school. Sue at Parkside approves of Shakespeare because 'you should have a challenge in English' [Pa 10a].

5.1.2 Textual authority: Throughout the interviews students resolutely refer to the various plays they have studied as 'books', a trait particularly marked in the Parkside year 9 students' discourse. These two specific interview transcripts are peppered with references to 'books'. Thus, for example, Rashid says that Shakespeare '...is just like reading from a normal book', and later asks 'Are they novels?'; Sid comments that 'his [Shakespeare's] books are too long'; Madhur says she likes Shakespeare because, 'it's different to the books we have nowadays'; Amina complains that Shakespeare's 'books are boring...' whereas 'if you read autobiographies that's interesting coz they're all different'. Conceiving of Shakespeare as a printed, literary text is by no means limited to the year 9 Parkside class, but interestingly is rarely marked discursively by Eastgate year 10 students whose teacher focused more on film than on printed text. Although each of the other year 9 and 10 classes encountered Shakespeare pedagogically as drama, they often refer to the plays as books and frequently make the assumption that the main vehicle for encountering Shakespeare is via the medium of print rather than stage or film performances. So, for instance, Ben talks about ordinary people gaining access to Shakespeare through simplified print versions; Joe repeatedly refers to 'books that Shakespeare wrote'; and an early comment of Meetal's suggests that she thinks of Shakespeare as a text-book: 'it's hard to understand what he's actually saying, and coz in the books it gives the definitions of the words so it makes it a bit easier' [Pa 10b].

As readers of specific texts, students offer little in terms of what might be termed a 'personal response' during interviews. On occasions, when invited to support something they have said (for example that they enjoyed some parts of a play), students very often become vague. The following exchange with Graham and Richard, both in Eastgate's year 10, is a very rare example of students not only

offering specific examples of the 'best bits' of a particular play (albeit nudged by me), but also discussing it in a way that makes connections with their own lives:

> **JC:** ...OK, what were the best bits of the play, do you think? The bits that you did understand, the bits you can remember, what were the best bits?
> **Richard:** The battles mostly
> **Graham:** Yeah
> **Richard:** Not for the fighting, although there were quite a lot of good fights, but the speeches
> **Graham:** Yeah, the speeches, they stick in my mind.
> **JC:** What speech? Whose speeches?
> **Richard:** Um, what speech is it?
> **Graham:** Back into the breach [others: yeah] Yeah that sticks in my head.
> **JC:** What was good about that?
> **Graham:** It was quite inspiring
> **Richard:** Yeah.
> **JC:** If you'd been a soldier at the time, you think you'd have been inspired to go into the battle even though you knew there was a good chance of you getting killed?
> **Richard:** Yeah.
> **Graham:** Hm. No, I'm a right coward [laughs]
> **JC:** So, it was inspiring but not inspiring enough to get you grabbing your sword and go off to do some damage to the French!
> **Graham:** [laughs] No, not really.
>
> [Ea 10a]

More frequently, my invitations for students to talk about bits of the play they had enjoyed result in recalling little detail, as for example with this extract from a year 9 interview with Parkside students:

> **JC:** ... [turns to Madhur] So, some of the bits of reading you liked, did you?
> **Madhur:** Yeah
> **JC:** [pause] So, which bits stand out in your memory, then?
> **Madhur:** [pause] um (2) I don't really (2) none [tails off]
>
> [Pa 9a]

And a similar moment with Eastgate students:

> **Yasmin:** [Reads from statement card] 'Shakespeare's boring'. I disagree -
> **Dijean:** - Yeah, I disagree as well -

Chris: - Totally
JC: Why do you disagree, Yasmin?
Yasmin: Because in quite a few scenes there are quite a few actions going on and he does, um, well (2) [laughs]
JC: Well, what are the interesting bits then? In *Macbeth* what would you say are the interesting bits?
Yasmin: Where all the action is, where Lady Macbeth and him have their relationship and stuff.
JC: Can you, um, remember a particular scene?
Yasmin: Um (.) when Lady Macbeth, um, went, er, I can't remember the actual scene (2)

[Ea 9b]

I would argue that this is probably the result of students having been positioned passively in the reading process, where they have experienced the play in a disconnected way, adopting an 'efferent' rather than 'aesthetic' attitude to the reading (Rosenblatt, 1994). Elsewhere when students are discussing their SATs paper, they express relief that their teacher had covered a similar question with them previously so that they know what to say:

JC: OK, for your SATs [takes out the SATs paper] you got the question 'Explain how Macbeth reacts to death and to danger'. What did you think about the question? Did you think it was hard? Easy?
Fatimah: It was quite alright coz our teacher did that question with us just before -
Madhur: - Yeah just before the test
JC: What, literally in the hour before you sat the test?
[various: 'yeah']

[Pa 9a]

The other Parkside group similarly feel dependent on their teacher's guidance:

Joynab: What was the question again?
JC: It was, 'Explain how Macbeth reacts to death and to danger in these extracts'. What did you think of the question?
Joynab: At the beginning he was (.) he was, um, he wanted to kill a lot of people, but when his wife died he, um, towards that, he acted like he was all strong about it but he wasn't.
JC: So did you think, was it quite an easy question? Do you think you answered it quite well?
Billy: No, bad.

Emma: Oh, that was what the debates were about! The lesson before me and Jenny debated that.
Joynab: I think we was lucky we did that before, coz that made it an easy thing to do.
Amina: And that's why we could have a stab at it because otherwise we didn't have no idea what it was about.

[Pa 9b]

For these year 9 students, the teacher's explanations ultimately form the 'correct' way of thinking about the play, one to be reproduced as far as possible in an examination.

As seen in the previous chapter, Pip presents a conventional reading of *Romeo and Juliet* in her year 10 classroom, one that constructs the play purely as a love story. This is echoed in her students' comments when interviewed, with Ezekiel, for example, drawing parallels with soap opera plots:

JC: ...Um, is *Romeo and Juliet* like anything you've read or seen before?
Gurjal: No.
Sue: Yeah, a bit, coz um with most of Shakespeare's work, other authors and writers actually get inspired by him and by his ideas. With him he's an author with themes in his plays, and others take bits off him
JC: So is there anything you can think of that's got similar *Romeo and Juliet*-like bits in it? (2) Films or books?
Ss [murmur]
Ezekiel: There's, there's *Eastenders* [laughs, other Ss: yeah]. There's this film, Romeo died because he fell in love with Juliet, it's like that in films these days, soaps because, say they fall in love with someone and that gets them into trouble
JC: Yeah?
Ezekiel: So that if they have an affair you get in trouble with the other, er your family, your children or whatever, this is the kind of thing on films and on TV.

[Pa 10a]

This has echoes of Pip's opening lesson where she invited her students to think of exciting film openings and then make connections with Shakespeare's craft as a playwright. Consequently, the year 10 students from Parkside are the only ones to draw parallels with popular film and television during interviews.

Most student comments about specific plays remain rooted at basic plot level, however a number of students also make reference to character as a key to understanding a play. For the most part this is the kind of expressive realist conception of character that involves speculation as to what characters 'feel' or 'think' at specific moments of the play. So, in considering a *Macbeth* SATs test question (how Macbeth reacts to death and danger in the three set scenes), Joynab comments:

> They [Macbeth and Lady Macbeth] were scared about it but when Lady Macbeth died he was still scared about it in a different way. Yeah, he acted like he didn't care.
>
> [Pa 9b]

And she later asserts that along with some knowledge of the set scenes, 'you need to know the characters'. Whilst Meera and Annie (year 9 Eastgate) make an almost identical point, Annie hints at a more complex notion of 'character' when she asserts, 'I think you do need to understand how the characters got into that position'. Although this suggests an understanding of 'character'as situated in a specific social context, it is nevertheless conceptually bound up with the supposed universality of Shakespeare's characters:

> **Annie:** ...people are still driven for power and still do these sort of things -
> **Meera:** - yeah, like Lady Macbeth. Someone who will [unclear] like Lady Macbeth.
> **Annie:** Yeah for power...Characters that people use nowadays, the people they refer to in Shakespeare's plays are still like ones we've got now.
>
> [Ea 9a]

Dijean and Chris also allude to characters in *Macbeth* from the same perspective:

> **Dijean:** ...we still have problems like that now, right? And we still relate to them.
> **Chris:** Mm [unclear] and relationship problems.
>
> [Ea 9b]

The idea that *Macbeth* is 'about' relationship problems would require the play to be seen through a particularly distorting soap opera lens, pressing the play into the service of modern preoccupations. But it is an approach which is also adopted by students from Parkside year 10, as cited earlier, when Ezekiel appears to reduce *Romeo and Juliet* to the level of a soap opera plot: falling-in-love-with-the-wrong-person. On the one hand, making links between Shakespeare and popular cultural forms enables students to better engage with *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*, on the other it risks reproducing the plays as depoliticised, domesticated dramas, potentially reducing the range of interpretive possibilities.

This dichotomy, between the humanising effect of using 'characterisation' as an accessible way into the plays for young people and the adoption of less traditional literary approaches which do not treat each play as a slice of real life, is nowhere more pronounced than in some of the classroom drama-based work. Again, the specific pedagogical approaches of the four teachers appear to be reflected in the students' interview comments and these are analysed in the next section.

5.1.3 Shakespeare constructed as drama: In answer to my invitation for students to talk about lessons they had enjoyed, drama activities were without exception nominated as the most popular, very much in line with the results of the student survey (see Appendix M). Sue summarises the appeal of drama and performance thus:

> Especially like you're sitting there and the teacher's explaining people will tend to wander off a lot, but when you're acting you're getting involved yourself, so I think that helps a lot.
>
> [Pa 10a]

Role-play is the main drama activity mentioned by the students. However, as my analysis of classroom data indicates, the way role play activities often bring

characters 'to life' means that this approach tends to shift interpretation of the play towards an expressive realist paradigm (although Beth's students generally avoid describing Henry as a real person). In the main, students' comments about the drama activities they have participated in (role play in particular) reflect this tendency. Typical, for example is the following exchange between year 10 students from Parkside talking about working with *Romeo and Juliet*:

> **JC:** Thinking back to your *Romeo and Juliet* lessons, what were your favourite lessons? Anything that stands out in your memory that you really enjoyed doing?
> **Ezekiel:** Watching the video.
> **Abeola:** No, the play as well, when we -
> **Ezekiel:** - performing -
> **Abeola:** - when we got to be the characters and we actually got to experience how the characters were feeling which gave us more of an understanding.
> **JC:** Do you mean in class, or was there a theatre company who came in?
> **Abeola:** In class.
> **JC:** In class, when you were acting out some of the scenes? How does that help you?
> **Abeola:** You get more of an understanding of why characters do some of the things they do.
> **Gurjal:** What they like.
> **JC:** Right, and is it, do you think that's a good way to work?
> **Gurjal:** Yes
> **JC:** Ezekiel, what about you?
> **Ezekiel:** Um, when you're reading, sometimes, you may not understand how they would say it, because you're just reading a text, but when you're acting it out you're doing (.) putting across body language, facial expressions, so that you understand how they seem, how they are in the text so if you're not good at getting the point of the text then it's good for those sort of people (.) who, er, don't understand (.) the text.
>
> [Pa 10a]

On the one hand, this suggests a more engaged reading process, something akin to Rosenblatt's notion of 'the live process of the literary event' (1994, p.16). On the other it indicates students equating understanding of character with understanding the play, similar to Pip's observed approach in the classroom. Access to 'the text' via 'character' is seen as a goal. What becomes important is experiencing the apparently authentic feelings, motivations and preferences of people who inhabit the play, rather than exploring roles, ideas and situations in a

more abstract sense. The other Parkside interview group talk about *Romeo and Juliet* in similar terms:

> **Ben:** I like the dramatic lessons (2) er, the dramatised ones, coz we (.) you can (.) I suppose when you read you imagine how it looks in your head, but when you add drama to it you can get more of a feeling how the characters are. And what they'd be doing at that specific time.
> **JC:** What is it about the drama work that helps you understand it? Anything more you can say about that? Anyone else like to chip in?
> **Joe:** Yeah, I think if you get into the character's roles you understand what it's like [Asha: yeah] Because what we basically done, we got lines and we had to act out the lines, you put yourself in the role and saying it helped you understand it, or their view or whatever
> **Asha:** I agree with that
>
> [Pa 10b]

Ben's comment focuses upon the importance of performance in transferring a play from page to stage, but both he and Joe take their comments one step further in asserting the centrality of an idealist notion of character: enter a character's mind and you get to the heart of the play.

Eastgate year 9s describe hot-seating activities they enjoyed, summed up by Tunde as 'how we analysed the characters.' Annie also remembers 'when we builded each section, the bit on certain characters' as an activity which worked for her – this was a lesson I observed (Mac5), combining drama in groups with subsequent chart completion. Both she and Meera suggest that not only does this enable students to be more involved in the lesson, but that it helps them understand the characters, 'coz you get a better sense of why they'd say something, you just get more of an understanding about it and the more you understand it the easier it is to enjoy.' The Eastgate year 10 groups also found role play to be supportive of understanding *Henry V*. Both groups vividly recall the classroom role-play involving the gift of tennis balls, but it is interesting that none of the Eastgate year 10 students begin to talk about experiencing Henry's thoughts or feelings through role play. Indeed, Graham (with some support from Richard) is

able to disengage sufficiently from any conventional notion of character to analyse the presentation of the role of Henry in historical and cultural terms:

> **Graham:** Shakespeare was quite kind to the monarchy, in a lot of his things he made them look really good, but I guess he had to do that otherwise he'd have been killed. He made some things toned down, or made them look quite good and sometimes he exaggerated things so the queen might like Shakespeare.
> **JC:** Do you think he's doing that with *Henry V* though?
> **Graham:** Um, yeah although I don't think he was that much of a hero. He's made out to be better than he was. He seems inhuman at some points. He should really (2) er, maybe I'm wrong, maybe he was the best king ever! [laughs]
> **JC:** But you don't think he comes out like that particularly in the play?
> **Richard:** He does come out like that [Graham chips in; both speak at the same time– unclear]
> **Graham:** For example, he picks a fight for no apparent reason and just becomes a good king. It's pointless the way he did that. But it seems they've made him into a hero with all these speeches which make him sound all heroic, so basically they've made him look like a really good king even though the things he's done weren't good.
> [Ea 10a]

Not only does Graham quite clearly see Henry as a historical and political figure, he also appears to consider the play as a construct indelibly shaped by the moment of its production. Interestingly, in this little piece of dialogue Graham slips from talking about authorial intention (Shakespeare's presentation of Henry) into an impersonal third person plural ('they've made him look like a really good king'), which might reflect that the version of Henry his class came to know was mainly by means of a film production. In the other interview group, a comment made by Graham's classmate, Owsun, yet again suggests that for Beth's students Henry is viewed as a dramatic figure rather than a real person. During a discussion around Shakespeare's reputation as 'England's greatest writer' some of the students suggest names of other writers they have enjoyed more than Shakespeare. Owsun nominates Jacqueline Wilson for her Tracy Beaker novels, justifying his choice by saying: 'One, it's more modern. And, two, Tracy Beaker's about real people'. Despite the apparent banality of comparing Shakespeare

unfavourably with Jacqueline Wilson (a popular children's writer), Owsun's point is revealing in the way he perceives character. From the interview evidence at least it seems that Beth's approach to teaching *Henry V* has succeeded in rupturing the traditional engagement with 'real' characters.

Despite not experiencing drama-based activities within lessons, Parkside year 9 students are clear that, 'You should do acting in the class', as Rashid puts it. This class had a brief opportunity to enjoy some performance-based work when a TIE company had visited their school with an abbreviated version of *Macbeth* supported by an accompanying workshop. This proved to be popular with the students (although not appreciated by their teacher, as my interview with Felicity indicates), and both interview groups immediately mention the TIE visit in answer to my question about lessons they had enjoyed, although Joynab remarks that she did not understand all of the performance. The Parkside year 10 class also fondly recall seeing a TIE company in school during their previous SATs year.

The majority of students mention watching a film version as a positive experience, although this is not universal. Data from both the interviews and the student questionnaires indicate that hardly any of the students have seen a Shakespeare play on stage (a fact I return to in a later section), and therefore film plays an important role in providing access for all students to a professional performance. However, not all film versions are equally appreciated by students, and the way teachers incorporate them in the scheme of work appears to be significant. So, as Rashid makes clear film can be a successful support for Shakespeare studies, 'if the teacher's, right, interesting, that's OK. If you just watch the film and read the book then that's not good' [Pa 9a]. Predictably, Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* goes down well with Pip's year 10 class. Here, for example, are some of Pip's students talking about the film:

> **Joe:** ... [even though] they use the old-fashioned words, they make it interesting...

Meetal: Coz I don't understand it when I read it, I really like it when we watch it. It's more modern.
Joe: You can understand it better because you can relate to it.

[Pa 10b]

With its high-tech digital editing techniques and slick urban style, Luhrmann's film has cross-over appeal. Even students from other classes claim knowledge of *Romeo and Juliet* from seeing the film outside of school. Marie's year 9 group are vocal in their preference for *Romeo and Julie*t:

JC: Would you want to read [another Shakespeare] in class again, like you've done with Ms Smith?
Meera: If it wasn't optional, I wouldn't really mind, but if it was optional I wouldn't (.). If it was *Romeo and Juliet* -
Annie: Yeah, that's the thing, I'd like to do *Romeo and Juliet*. We'd know what happens.
Meera: That's it, it's the main reason we'd all heard of Shakespeare, from the film.
Annie: Yeah, and it's the most common one. But I did really enjoy *Romeo and Juliet*.
...
Meera: You know why I enjoyed *Romeo and Juliet*? Coz it was modernised
JC: Yeah it's a really lively film, isn't it?
Annie: Yeah
Meera: [unclear] it would be good if they modernised like all the Shakespeare plays. Lots of people would watch it...

[Ea 9a]

Beth's year 10 class likewise express a desire to read *Romeo and Juliet*, a preference inspired by the Luhrmann film:

Joshua: if we did *Romeo and Juliet* I guarantee that it would be more [pause]
JC: How do you know about *Romeo and Juliet*?
Karen: The film.
Owsun: It's the most famous of Shakespearean plays. Everyone knows it, really.
JC: And had you seen the Baz Luhrmann film?
Owsun: Yeah.
Karen: Yeah, a couple of years ago.
JC: [to Joshuah] And have you seen it?
Joshua: Yeah, it made it more enjoyable.

[Ea 10b]

At the opposite end of the popularity scale is the 1978 RSC version of *Macbeth* (dir. Trevor Nunn) which Felicity afterwards regrets using with her year 9 class. The students generally are critical of its studio style:

> **Madhur:** ...the film was boring.
> **Rashid:** Yeah, the film was all dark, low sound.
> **JC:** Black and white, isn't it?
> **Rashid:** Yeah, it was -
> **Fatimah:** - yeah, black and white, er, the whole thing was all black.
> **JC:** They were wearing black and white costumes, weren't they?
> **Fatimah:** Yeah, that was it, they didn't have much else.
> [various speak at once]
> **Sid:** And they didn't have no scenes, like.
> **Fatimah:** No scenes, yeah.
> **Rashid:** [with emphasis] No setting.
>
> [Pa 9a]

The trouble is that this version is essentially a video recording of a theatre production and therefore it cannot be judged in film terms. Felicity presented it to her class without explaining its provenance and without comparing scenes from this version with, say, scenes from Polanski's film so that students might appreciate the difference. Since the students did not get a chance to experience the play as active drama in the classroom either, overall they appear to have come away with a much more negative view of Shakespeare than the other classes - a finding which is very much in line with evidence emerging from the RSC LPN programme (Irish, 2008; Galloway and Strand, 2010), where there appears to be a correlation between exposure to drama-based approaches and positive attitudes to Shakespeare. Out of the eight students interviewed from Felicity's year 9 class, only Rashid says he would want to contemplate tackling another play, and the others are vocal in their rejection of Shakespeare. However, within the same interview some of these same students positively recall watching an animated version of a Shakespeare play in their final year at Primary school as a part of a unit of work on the Tudors, an indication that it would be wrong to dismiss their negative responses as merely stereotypical markers of adolescent opposition to all

things scholastic. In Beth's year 10 class only Chaz voices an outright dislike of Branagh's film of *Henry V*, although Josh's criticism that 'They were still talking gibberish', suggests that the performance did not transcend the language barrier for him.

Tunde, in the Eastgate year 9 class, makes some interesting points about the difference between reading the text out loud and watching a production of a play. He is a student very much involved in drama clubs and later in his interview describes taking part in a Shakespeare festival at the National Theatre. He is one of the few students who appears to have found the reading of a play an experience that engaged him imaginatively:

> **Tunde:** ... I preferred to read it than watch the film. Coz I can picture what was happening (.)
> **Annie:** I'd rather watch the play -
> **Meera:** - yeah coz –
> **Tunde:** - for me, I'd just picture it (.) like the murder, as it's happening
> **Meera:** I think that the best way's not the film, but to read it with someone for different characters, like in class or like listening to the tape, coz you're more involved like, and when we watched it live -
> **Annie:** - yeah, when those people came in and performed it. I enjoyed that.
> **Tunde:** And also if you read it, if you watched the video, it would say the line in a particular way, but if you read it you could say it however you want.
> **Meera:** You can interpret it however you want.
> **JC:** Right, and Ms Smith sometimes got you to try it out in different ways?
> **Meera/Tunde:** - yeah –
> **Annie:** - and how we would show it, body language and that.

Here, the act of reading aloud in class is recognised by the students as part of an interpretive process, one closely linked to acting and taking parts, possibly close to Rosenblatt's notion of reading as 'an event in time' (1994, p.12), where she envisages the reader of Shakespeare reading like a director, sounding the script out in their head and imagining the action. As seen in the previous chapter, this process plays a significant part in Marie's pedagogic approach, where the text is

most frequently treated as a script by means of, for example, 'reading circles', small group acting and whole class direction activities, all taken to be a normal part of reading.

5.1.4 Shakespeare as icon: An awareness of Shakespeare's cultural reputation underpins much of the interview data across all four student groups. It surfaces explicitly at specific points, sometimes in response to my overt questions or statement cards, at others it is implied and emerges in unexpected ways. As might be predicted, at one extreme some students are vocal in blanket rejection of Shakespeare as 'boring', whilst at the other end of the spectrum students adopt a more deferential view. To what extent Shakespeare's iconic status affects the learning process is a key question to ask, particularly since Shakespeare may have a significant role in shaping students' overall attitudes to English. In research undertaken in the first five years of the National Curriculum (Stables et al., 1995), Shakespeare was as frequently cited by year 8 and 9 students as a reason for enjoying English as it was for disliking English, leading researchers to nominate Shakespeare amongst a number of key determinants in establishing year 8/9 pupils' preferences.

In my interviews, students respond in a number of ways to the statement card: 'Shakespeare is England's greatest ever writer' (see Appendix F). Whereas some students reject this notion on grounds of personal taste and suggest other writers they have enjoyed more (predominantly children's authors such as Roald Dahl and Jacqueline Wilson), others confirm Shakespeare's iconic status. In Joshua's words, 'he's famous, he's a big man, he's like antique, a legend sort of thing' [Ea 10b]. Dijean emphasises historical and contemporary aspects of Shakespeare's reputation: '...when he first started writing plays, I don't know when that was, but that people were still marvelling at how good they are, even now'. Taking this one stage further, what emerges from the Parkside year 10 interviews is an inflated sense that all modern literature, television and film texts owe a debt to Shakespeare. Sue says, '...with most of Shakespeare's work, other authors and

writers actually get inspired by him and by his ideas. With him he's an author with themes in his plays and others take bits off him' [Pa 10a], followed by Ezekiel's example of *Eastenders* quoted earlier. Ben echoes this notion in the other interview group:

> ...it gives you a general idea of how most things today are (.) set and how they're performed, like soaps today, or something, basically anything we have now, you know on TV, it just relates back to Shakespeare. That's how original his writing was. [Pa 10b]

Such beliefs would appear to have roots in Pip's lessons where she makes links between Shakespeare's craft as a playwright and popular film (for example in the opening lesson discussed in the previous chapter, see sequence 4(27) above). Within my overall sample, Pip's students are unique in wanting to attribute the success of popular TV and film to the lasting genius of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's construction as an intellectual icon appears to hold a firm place in the consciousness of students in all four interview groups (also strongly marked in the surveys: see Appendix M). Earlier, I referred to Amina's anxiety about coping with Shakespeare at GCSE, and indeed most of the interviewees are agreed that Shakespeare is difficult to understand, particularly the language. Abeola suggests that the reason 'some people think it's boring' is 'because they can't understand the language' [Pa 10a]; Ben agrees that the 'way Shakespeare writes is very sophisticated' [Pa 10b] necessitating simplified versions for some, with Asha and Meetal from the same group emphasising how hard the language is. Their concerns about the difficulty of studying Shakespeare seem to accord with their teachers' views that the plays require intensive levels of mediation in order to make them intelligible to all students, as discussed in the previous chapter. A logical extension of this perception is that Shakespeare not only provides a high degree of intellectual challenge, but may be used to make judgements about people's intellectual worth. So, for instance, Richard suggests:

> It's probably a good gauge of, um, people's abilities, their minds as well. If you can understand the Shakespeare properly and write about it properly then you, your teacher will understand that you're highly intelligent because it's quite difficult unless your skills are, er quite developed, whereas some people find it very difficult, so I guess you could use it to gauge ability [Ea 10a]

Similarly, Rashid, a year 9 student at Parkside asserts, 'Shakespeare can be very difficult, yeah, and if you can be an expert at that you can be known as intelligent' [Pa 9a].

What interests me particularly is the way this perceived intellectual challenge (and potential for intellectual validation) can motivate or demotivate students. Whereas Meera and Annie, both high-attaining girls in Marie's class, welcome the study of Shakespeare in year 9 as a marker of progression within the education system, Mehmet appears to have found the prospect of Shakespeare completely alienating:

> **JC**: When Ms Smith first said you'd be studying a Shakespeare play, what was your first reaction to that? What did you think?
> **Mehmet:** I wanted to kill myself...
> **Meera:** I actually thought we'd matured, like, that we'd be doing something that bigger people study, you know, something special.
> **JC:** So, you'd learnt enough in English to be able to read Shakespeare?
> **Meera:** Yeah
> **JC:** When you get to year 9 –
> **Meera:** - yeah, we'd really gone up a level.
> **Annie:** I thought it was something that was going to be taken seriously, coz, I think, um, Shakespeare's something that you learn about (.) you need to, er, I dunno, there's a lot of in-depth things you need to learn about, and I think it's a subject that can be taken seriously as well as enjoying the stories.
> [Ea 9a]

Mehmet, a low-attaining boy of Kurdish heritage, actually buries his head in his hands and groans later in the interview when I ask if any of them would want to read another play in the future. Meera and Annie, by contrast, link the study of Shakespeare with intellectual maturity and welcome the opportunity to make this

progress. They recognise the National Curriculum to be hierarchically organised, fit Shakespeare in to this structure and respond positively to this. Annie reiterates and further develops her comment a few minutes later:

> **Annie:** Yeah, I said it was going to be a scheme, a section of work, that would be serious, that was going to be, I don't know, something quite focused and quite (.) this is what you're working for, to be able to understand this.

For these two girls Shakespeare is the pinnacle of academic achievement in English, a confirmation of their academic success at this stage of their school careers. Other students, too, appear to regard reading Shakespeare as a mark of intellectual worth. In a different interview Emma, a Parkside student, comments: 'I think you have to be intelligent to understand what he's [Shakespeare] saying (.) coz I think he's confusing'. The final part of her statement perhaps indicates that she excludes herself from the elite group able to understand Shakespeare.

In a study of the way middle class and working class children negotiate the kinds of textual knowledge required by the organisation of schooled literacy, Gemma Moss (2000) offers some interesting insights which are relevant here. Just as Annie and Meera are seen to do, middle class students in Moss' study 'saw the school curriculum as defining literacy in terms which are hierarchical and progressive; they represented themselves as at a particular point on a ladder of expertise' (p.59). For these students the school texts take on a usefulness, a specific purpose in a longer-term view of each student's educational pathway. By contrast, Moss found that none of the working class children she interviewed articulate this hierarchy: they merely state an immediate preference or otherwise for the texts in question. Significantly, the only occasion in which working class students express understanding of the way in which school texts are organised hierarchically is when three 15 year old girls voluntarily talk to Moss about how boring they find Shakespeare. They are acutely aware that named middle-class class-mates can use success with Shakespeare to further their school careers (for example access to college) whilst they represent themselves as excluded from this

trajectory. Moss' conclusion is that these girls do not necessarily lack the cultural capital to connect with this literary experience but that they have, as she puts it, 'made a realistic appraisal of their own futures. And schooling in this context offers them nowhere to go.' (p.62)

Students' preconceptions regarding the exclusivity of Shakespeare are further revealed in answer to the question, 'What kind of person loves Shakespeare?' Of all the year 9 students interviewed, Chris and Annie are the only students who do not seem to assume that the appeal of Shakespeare is limited to a specific category of person, usually characterised by age or class. Chris states very reasonably: 'It's hard to generalise, what kind of people like it because everyone has different tastes…' [Ea 9b]; Annie's response that anyone who likes English as a subject will enjoy Shakespeare is in direct contrast to Meera and Mehmet's suggestion that those who like Shakespeare constitute a narrowly traditionalist group of people:

> **JC:** If I said what kind of person loves Shakespeare…?
> **Mehmet:** Tony Blair!
> **Annie:** People that enjoy English and English language.
> **Meera:** Old-fashioned people and stuff.
>
> [Ea 9a]

In the following extract Billy may well have students like Chris and Annie in mind when he says Shakespeare will appeal to 'boffins' (a pejorative term used by school students to refer to intelligent, hard-working class-mates):

> **JC:** What kind of person do you think loves Shakespeare?
> **Billy:** Boffins [laughs]
> **Emma:** And posh people.
> **Amina:** Yeah, old-fashioned people. You know, who sit in their mansions [laughter from others] reading their books [laughter].
> **Joynab:** With their libraries! [laughs]
> **JC:** With their volumes of Shakespeare on the shelf? [various: yeah, laughter].
> **Billy:** And English teachers! [laughter]

[Pa 9b]

A similar picture emerges from the year 10 interviews. Graham, like Chris, formally identified in school data as 'gifted & talented' (G&T), suggests that Shakespeare will appeal to people who are involved in drama because of the 'good parts and good speeches' (a rare moment where a student spontaneously conceives of a Shakespeare play as a performance text); whereas other students variously suggest typical Bard-fans to be: 'the Queen', ' a book wizard', 'librarians', 'posh people' and 'old people'. The recurrent theme from students who are not as academically successful as Chris, Annie or Graham is Shakespeare's exclusivity. Here, for example, are a group of Parkside year 9 students talking:

JC: ...So, what kind of a person, do you think, loves Shakespeare?
Fatimah: Old people
Rashid: Yeah, old people
Madhur: People who like writing, yeah -
Sid: - and reading
JC: So, old people, people who like writing and reading.
Madhur: Yeah, old. (2) And like watching plays.
JC: Yeah?
Rashid: Very posh people
Fatimah: Yeah, like Rashid! [laughs]
JC: [laughing] Posh people, like Rashid?
Rashid: I'm not posh!
JC: So, why do you think posh people would like Shakespeare?
Rashid: Because they can relate to Shakespeare, coz he was posh as well.
JC: Was he?
Rashid: Er, I dunno! [Laughter] No, it's right that he was coz, yeah, it's right that he was. His language, the way that he used words, well I think so.
JC: Right? Do you think he was posh in his day or he seems to be posh to us now?
Rashid: Posh people used to watch it.
Fatimah: Yeah that's right, yeah. That was entertainment for that time.

[Pa 9a]

Posh people can relate to Shakespeare because he was posh too. This somewhat belies the idea that compulsory Shakespeare for all is a democratising process, as claimed for example in the RSC 'Time for Change'/'Stand up for Shakespeare'

publicity material (see, for instance, RSC, 2007; 2008), and by various politicians. I get no sense that reading *Macbeth* or even *Romeo and Juliet* has broken down cultural barriers for the students in my study; rather, access to the 'Standard Culture' (Neelands, 2008, p.11) appears to have confirmed such preconceptions. Furthermore, the opportunity for all to study a play at Key Stage 3 and at Key Stage 4 has not resulted in an overwhelming desire for these students to engage with another Shakespeare text, as discussed above.

Part of the RSC's 'Time for Change'/'Stand up for Shakespeare' drive is to broaden the appeal of theatre-going. In total, only 6 out of the thirty-three students I interviewed said they had ever seen a Shakespeare play on stage, none of whom came from the two Parkside classes. (Surveys of all four classes indicate that while approximately one third of the 'mixed attainment' Eastgate classes had been to the theatre at some point to see a Shakespeare play, a tiny percentage of the 'middle set' students at Parkside claim to have done this; see survey results summarised in Appendix M). Predictably it transpires that Graham, Chris and Annie are in the minority of students who come from a theatre-going home background. Annie has seen *Romeo and Juliet* at the theatre with her English teacher mother; Graham has been to the open air theatre at Regents Park; and Chris' family have all seen *Macbeth* on stage when his older brother was studying it at school. During the interview Chris allows us a glimpse into his family background, one where discussion takes place at family meal-times, and ideas about Shakespeare are shared in day-to-day exchanges:

> **Chris:** I liked it [Macbeth] because my brother had done it a few years before and we would sit round the dinner table and have discussions about Macbeth and that scene with the ghost. We saw a performance of it, so I looked forward to it, but when I got into it, it was alright but it was just (2) no different to any other play, really [Ea 9b].

It is no wonder that Chris, Annie and Graham confidently take Shakespeare in their stride. Contrast their easy familiarity with theatre as a cultural form with a group of year 10 students at Parkside:

> **JC:** Any of you been to the theatre to see Shakespeare?
> **Gurjal:** Was *Phantom of the Opera* Shakespeare?
> **Sue:** [laughs] No!
> **JC:** No.
> **Abeola:** [surprised tone] Do they do it in the theatre?
> **JC:** Yeah, sometimes Shakespeare's plays are put on in the theatre.
> **Abeola:** The theatre's quite expensive if you go by yourself, out of school. But if the school actually gave us a trip that would be so good, yeah -
> **Gurjal:** - that would help with our GCSE.
> **Abeola:** That would give you tips, to go to the theatre to watch Shakespeare, because none of us actually go.
> **Gurjal:** It would be helpful -
> **Abeola:** - if we had the chance we would.
> **Ezekiel:** It would give us more of an understanding of what was going on.
>
> [Pa 10a]

Gurjal's apparent confusion of Andrew Lloyd Webber with Shakespeare, and Abeola's surprise that Shakespeare plays are performed in the theatre are equally revealing of cultural lives that do not match the official version of 'culture' as reflected in Government policy documents (see, for example, DCMS/DCSF, 2008). As Bourdieu (1976b, p.199) comments, within the school system 'Culture...takes on a differentiating function', where knowledge of the subtle codes and conventions of specific practices are taken for granted. Abeola's remarks indicate that live performances of Shakespeare bring matters of both cultural and economic capital into play. These students' expressed desire to participate more fully in a range of cultural practices perhaps suggest that the school's role needs to go beyond the confines of the classroom in a way exemplified by the RSC's Learning Performance Network outreach programme (see Galloway and Strand, 2010). It is worth noting at the same time that their eagerness to embrace 'middle-class culture' is not universal: Meetal from the other Parkside interview group states emphatically, 'I'd <u>never</u> want to go there' when asked about the theatre.

One of the other students who had recently seen a stage performance of a Shakespeare play is Tunde, a year 9 student from Eastgate. His experience as part of a drama group participating in the annual national Shakespeare in Schools drama festival at theatres around the country has for him sparked an interest and a confidence which is noticeable in the quality of his classroom interactions (particularly with a teacher who regularly employs drama-based teaching strategies). School attainment data, however, depicts Tunde as a low-achieving boy. In interview he generally attempts to be positive in his comments about Shakespeare. For example, a typical response comes when he agrees that Shakespeare should be in the National Curriculum: 'I have learnt a lot about how to read Shakespeare and everything. If I read a Shakespeare book it's quite helpful…It gives you more insight…'. I find it fascinating that in the following extract he spontaneously adopts a 'posh' accent when talking about his theatre experience and visit to the National Theatre, as though he's conscious of being somehow both a participant and yet an outsider at the same time:

> **JC:** How many of you have actually seen a Shakespeare play on stage, apart from the company that came into school? [Annie and Tunde put their hands up] Two of you?
> **Tunde:** I did on Sunday. We were acting on stage.
> **JC:** Oh, you mean the Shakespeare in Schools festival?
> **Tunde:** Yeah, we did [posh voice] *The Taming of the Shrew.*
> **JC:** And was that with this school? Or with a drama club?
> **Tunde:** With Ms X.
> **JC:** And you saw other schools perform theirs as well?
> **Tunde:** Yeah (.)
> **JC:** Where was it held?
> **Tunde:** [posh voice] The National Theatre.
>
> [Ea 9a]

Canonical literature is often regarded as a 'common inheritance', with compulsory study as somehow both a democratising and a unifying move (as evidenced by Michael Gove's policy statements, 2010). Yet the diversity of response from these year 9 and 10 students suggests that the extent to which they feel that

Shakespeare is part of their own cultural heritage is highly variable, and this is despite repeated curriculum forays into the plays or into Shakespeare's life and times from primary school onwards. Graham, yet again, is one of the few who talks about Shakespeare as part of 'our history and heritage' and that 'it relates to us all'. Bode recognises Shakespeare as 'one of the biggest influences in English', which he clarifies as meaning what it is to be English, without in any way relating it to his own life. An interesting debate arises in the second Eastgate interview group around the place of Shakespeare in the curriculum when Joshua spontaneously links Shakespeare and the Bible, in that 'it's the same language but the Bible's more interesting than Shakespeare' [Ea 10b], a point agreed by Owsun but vehemently rejected by Chaz. Joshua continues to promote the Bible rather than Shakespeare:

> **Joshua:** But you don't need Shakespeare, do you? It's not going to help us in the future.
> **Owsun:** But it's a good thing to learn, it's a good thing to learn!
> **JC:** Why is it a good thing to learn?
> **Owsun:** Because of the language and the heritage.
> **Chaz:** It's not my heritage!
> **Karen:** You're British aren't you?
> **JC:** Why, that's a really interesting comment, why did you say that? You said, 'It's not my heritage'
> **Chaz:** It's not my heritage. I'm not related to Shakespeare...I'm not really bothered, coz this country, really, it gets on my nerves, man, and soon as I reach eighteen, I'm leaving. But I still say, why Shakespeare? [unclear] Why is he the one? [unclear]
>
> [Ea 10b]

This piece of dialogue is particularly interesting for the way Shakespeare is linked to differing notions of Britishness in all four students' minds, reflecting the shifting complexities of often hybridised identity in modern urban Britain (Kearney, 2003, Carrington and Short, 1995), here crossing boundaries of faith, ethnicity and class. The tone of the argument, initiated by Joshuah's promotion of the Bible in school, quickly becomes quite heated, culminating in Chaz's renunciation of Shakespeare and 'this country' (unfortunately interrupted a few seconds later by the change of lesson pips – also marking the end of the interview). That students are not provided with formal curriculum space to unpick the way texts (for instance, the

Bible or *Henry V*) connect with their personal histories and beliefs means that the curriculum is likely to remain disconnected from students' lives, inert chunks of knowledge, the point of which is never made clear.

5.1.5 Multi-accentual Shakespeare: Here I am looking for instances of students engaging in ideas, making conscious connections between Shakespeare and their own cultural lives; attempting to locate counter hegemonic currents in what students say; identifying moments of cultural production. However, apart from Graham and Richard at Eastgate talking about Henry V's speeches (cited earlier) or debating Shakespeare's relationship to the monarchy, I found hardly any evidence of students actively interpreting the texts for themselves within their interview comments. Students' written responses will be examined in the section following.

It is striking that a number of students across all the groups react strongly against 'bardolatry', and are clear that literary preferences are a matter of individual taste, rather than inherent in the text itself. Yasmin's comment is typical: 'everyone has their own ideas on what they much prefer' [Ea 9b]; Chris argues 'I don't think people should be judged by their taste' [Ea 9b]; Sue says, 'everyone has their opinions and stuff' [Pa 10a]. Annie takes this one stage further: she appropriates the 'entitlement' argument by referring directly to Shakespeare's reputation ('everyone talks about how great Shakespeare is') and the importance therefore that everyone is able to make an informed opinion.

The interview transcripts provide numerous examples of students thinking about the plays in functional ways as discussed earlier in this chapter. There is plenty of evidence that for many of the students the specific play under study has remained an inert curriculum object, a set of facts to be learnt and shaped into whatever format the assessment system demands. Moments when individual students genuinely appear to make emotional or intellectual connections with a specific

play are rare indeed. Graham's comments about Shakespeare's relationship to the monarchy (cited earlier in section 5.1.3) demonstrate that he conceives of *Henry V* as a political play both of its time and one which has relevance for us now. He is one of the few students who are seen to look beyond basic plot and character in their interview comments.

5.2 Students' written responses

Since the inception of the National Curriculum, secondary school students' understanding of specific Shakespeare texts has generally been formally assessed via the written word (both at KS3 and at KS4, although for a brief period of time not exclusively at GCSE). Marshall (2006) raises questions about forms of assessment appropriate to the reading of aesthetic texts, and queries the validity of an assessment system which narrowly focuses on 'testable' objectives (such as content-based knowledge of plot, characters and themes). As she points out elsewhere (Marshall, 2011b), assessment objectives for reading (in England) increasingly tend to be analytical, focused around form and structure.

Turning to a sample of written essays (see Table 5c, below) from each of the classes under study (SATs practice answers and GCSE coursework essays), signs of enjoyment or personal engagement with the specific Shakespeare texts are hard to find and it is a particularly dispiriting experience to read through the collection of individual pieces, designed to summatively assess many hours of class and homework. I was dependent upon each teacher to pick out the selection of essays for me, and although I requested the essays of those students I interviewed (as listed in tables 5a and 5b, above), this was not always followed through.

Table 5c student sample of written essays

Group	Student	gender	ethnicity	KS2 English SATs level
9Ea				
	Tunde	m	Black African	3
	Meera	f	Indian	5
	Mehmet	m	Kurdish	2
	Dijean	m	Black Caribbean	4
	Carlos	m	Columbian	6 months in UK
	Chris	m	White UK	5 (G&T)
	Yasmin	f	Turkish	3
9Pa				
	Sid	m	White UK	4
	Joynab	f	'other Asian'	4
	Kursheed	f	Indian	4
	Billy	m	White/Asian	3
	Gurmeet	m	Indian	4
				KS3 English SATs level
10Ea				
	Bode	m	Black African	5
	Richard	m	White UK	6
	Owsun	m	Black African	5
	Ade	m	Black African	5
10Pa	Abeola	f	Black African	5
	Sue	f	White UK	6
	Ezekiel	m	Black Caribbean	6
	Gurjal	m	Indian	5

The essay questions set by the teachers are as follows:

- How are the themes of love and hate dramatised in Act 1 sc 5 of *Romeo & Juliet*? (year 10 Parkside)
- In your view how is war presented to the audience in the Harfleur scenes of *Henry V* (year 10 Eastgate)
- How is power shown in the set scenes? (*Macbeth*, year 9 Eastgate)
- Either a) to what extent do you feel sympathy for Macbeth in the set scenes? or b) What advice would you give to the actor playing Macbeth in the set scenes? (*Macbeth*, year 9 Parkside)

Given the extent to which students enjoyed drama-based lessons, when they come to respond in writing little of that dramatic awareness is translated across – even in the *Macbeth* question explicitly asking students to suggest advice for an actor playing the part (ironically, the group with no experience of drama-based classroom approaches are given a drama-based question). Ezekiel, writing about *Romeo and Juliet*, is the most striking exception. He picks up the key word 'dramatise' from the essay question and clearly conceives of the play as drama to be enacted. His essay (awarded a potential grade B by his teacher) is peppered with suggestions for performance which borrow from stage and film conventions (he does not make any distinction). The following is a typical example:

> 'My only love sprung from my only hate.' This quote is basically saying that Juliet's love came from the one thing her family told her to hate which are the montages [sic]. You could dramatise this by having happy music as people are leaving but at the moment Juliet is told, dramatic music is put on and guests leave slowly as Juliet talks about how distraught she is.

At other points Ezekiel suggests alternative ways of staging a particular moment, such as when Lord Capulet restrains Tybalt from breaking up the party:

> There are many ways this could be dramatised. The first way is for Capulet to slap Tybalt across the face to make him see sense. The audience would see this and understand that Capulet has authority over Tybalt and that he must listen to Capulet. Another way to dramatise Capulet's authority is to make sure Tybalt's eyes are always on the floor. This would stress to the audience that Tybalt is a little scared of his uncle and knows he has to respect him...

Ezekiel's comments are steeped in a visualised sense of the playtext, one where the interplay of characters provides much of the drama. Gurjal from the same class, is more typical in that he largely retells random moments from the play's narrative, and despite a reference to *Romeo and Juliet* as 'this film..described as one of the greatest love stories of all time', he resolutely ignores the invitation of the essay title to consider how these moments might be dramatised. It is worth mentioning that the writing frame provided by Pip performs a strong shaping function, particularly marked in each of the opening paragraphs from my sample,

where students locate the play and Shakespeare's theatre historically (a requirement of the GCSE assessment criteria of the time). For Ezekiel this ritualistic paragraph does not sit easily with the rest of his essay; he appears to exemplify Pip's later interview comment to me that in retrospect she felt that the relatively prescriptive writing frame served to constrain higher achieving students. For students who appear to write with less confidence, such as Sue, Pip's notes about Shakespeare's theatre are regurgitated in garbled, almost nonsensical form; for Gurjal it serves as a half understood, awkwardly detached opening paragraph:

> This play Romeo and Juliet was written in 1595. This play was acted out in a theatre called the Shakespeare's Globe, in that time the theatre was much more modern but now days it has improved for example some of the structure has changed. The audience use to be very different as well because when people use to come to the Shakespeare's globe they use to wear fancy dresses and there were different kinds of seats in the theatre...

Although Pip is able to tick each of these paragraphs and add a marginal comment flagging up 'context' or 'awareness of period' for the benefit of the Exam Board moderator, I get no sense of the students understanding the significance of context (apart from ticking an assessment box) or how they might integrate comments about Elizabethan theatrical conditions into an essay about the dramatisation of a specific scene. Similarly, in writing about *Henry V* Richard (Eastgate year 10) includes a few lines demonstrating his awareness of historical context towards the end of his essay:

> In conclusion I think that audiences from different timelines would take this differently. Nowadays people would think the threats were gruesome and a horrible thing to say, but back in the times when it was written and originally performed I think they would cheer when this happened, boo when the cowards tried not to enter the fray and believe in it much more than people would nowadays.

Richard appears to conceive of each audience as a uniform whole, responding to and interpreting the action in front of them in standardised ways; the desire to

identify historical difference leads him into an oversimplified view of Elizabethan society. Nevertheless, Richard's comment is awarded with a double tick by his teacher, careful to draw an examiner's attention to criteria fulfilled.

Generally, in contrast to some of the Eastgate students' spoken comments, their essays about *Henry V* do not demonstrate an awareness that they are dealing with a script for performance. Despite the apparent openness of the essay question ('in your view') and the direct reference to an 'audience' (as opposed to a reader), Beth's support sheets steer students firmly into a discussion of literary language and its effects, and although several students consistently use the term 'audience' rather than reader, this again suggests a homogeneous entity, such as in two of Owsun's comments: 'The audience see them as cowards that are too lazy to fight and die for their country'; 'the audience see Henry as king who will fight in his own wars, a king who gives inspiration to his men'. Ade, awarded the highest overall mark in my GCSE sample from Eastgate (in the region of a high grade B), writes a fluent and sometimes insightful essay, but an essay that treats *Henry V* as if it were a narrative prose text; apart from referring to specific 'scenes' and Henry's 'speeches' at no point does he communicate any real sense that what he is dealing with is a drama text.

The practice SATs essays that Felicity's students write, ostensibly providing advice to an actor, are in their execution more akin to traditional character studies than directorial notes. A single exception can be found in Kursheed's essay, where at one point she appears to grasp a sense of performance, matching mood with physical action:

> In Act 2 scene 2 Macbeth regrets what he has just done. So he should act ashamed and scared. He should hold his head down in shame and be a bit jumpy. Macbeth should be a bit nervous as well because he could be caught.

But mostly her points tend to be generalised comments on Macbeth's frame of mind in each of the set scenes. Likewise Joynab's essay which constitutes a series

of comments about Macbeth's thoughts and feelings, as encapsulated in the following extract:

> In act 5 scene 5 macbeth should act extremely hurt and upset as his wife has just passed away 'the queen my lord is dead' and as he hears of birnam wood coming towards dunsinane he should act tough...

Gurmeet appears to take the question in the essay title at face value, apparently misunderstanding the rules of the SATs question game. He advises the hypothetical actor to 'be well spoken and formal, not to use slang' (perhaps a reminder that Shakespeare is only for 'posh people'?). He goes on to assert that Macbeth 'is a well spoken person, the evidence is Act 2 scene 1 line 34 "is this a dagger which I see before me"'.

Across the sample of essays from all four classes, a recurrent feature is the way students lay out quotations, with no apparent recognition that they are discussing a playtext laid out as a script (let alone lines set out as poetry). Thus, Ade writes:

> Henry warns the governer if he does not surrender he will murder everyone in Harfleur.
> "If not, why, in a moment...look to see...defile the lodes of your shrill-shrieking daughters, your fathers taken by the silver beards and their most reverenced heads dashed to the walls".

Organisationally, the year 9 essays tend to follow the ritualistic 'PEE' formula, as exemplified in the opening point of Tunde's SATs essay on the balance of power in *Macbeth*:

> I think in this play Lady Macbeth show she has power by tell Macbeth what to do and how to act,
> "Come on; Gentle my Lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks; be bright and jovial among your guests tonight"
> This show that Lady Macbeth had all the power over Macbeth and she tell him what to do.

Where students have not adhered to the PEE formula, they are reminded to do so by the teacher. In Mehmet's case, comments such as, 'Macbeth is scared because he keeps having wierd thoughts and he is only thinking of scorpions and banquo and his fleance' earn him a summative comment that merely consists of 'Good Mehmet – remember to use PEE in each para' from Marie. In my sample most students are aware that they need to use quotations from the text, but in a number of cases the quotations appear to have been chosen at random. This is especially true of the Parkside year 9 students. So, for example, Gurmeet writes that Macbeth has to act innocently after the murder of Duncan and provides 'I have done the deed, did thou no hear a noise' as textual evidence. Joynab supplies 'The queen my lord is dead' as evidence of Macbeth's mood in this scene; Sid claims that Macbeth's words 'I have almost forgot the taste of fears...' tell us that Macbeth is upset. Sue (Parkside year 10) provides Capulet's words, 'Welcome gentlemen, ladies that have their toes' as evidence that 'the atmosphere is ecstatic'. Gurjal writes that Shakespeare dramatises themes of love in a really strong way, then includes the Nurse's words as proof: 'Madam, your mother craves a word with you'. At other times, the students who tend to retell bits of the story rather than make points relevant to the essay title copy out lengthy quotations as part of the narrative. What these examples suggest is that even if students are not clear about the play they are writing about, for the most part they have some sense of the required style of writing, with its imperative to include quotations.

As I indicated earlier, signs of personal enjoyment or genuine engagement with the play are rare in these essays. Chris and Meera (Eastgate year 9) write much more fluent SATs essays than the other year 9 students in my sample, but these essays remain competently detached in style. It is in Richard's and Ade's *Henry V* essays that I get some sense of two students who are creating meaning for themselves, revealed through moments of personal connection with the subject matter of the play. Richard opens his second paragraph by outlining some of the issues he will be discussing, for example: 'I will be looking at the gritty parts of war and the diplomatic (if that exists!) parts of war'. He argues that the looting by

Nym, Bardolph and Pistol is understandable in a war situation 'despite the consequences because, who knows, after the next turn you might be dead anyway'. Richard's essay appears to reflect his own language rather than consisting of a compilation of half understood phrases collated from a teacher's support sheet. At one point, for example, he suggests that Henry's order to 'use mercy' towards the defeated residents of Harfleur (rather than inflict the carnage he had threatened) 'shows that he is not a cold-hearted bastard and is in fact just bluffing'. Capitalising on the open invitation in the essay title, Richard's concluding paragraph ends by drawing links with present day world politics and the kinds of discussions encouraged by his teacher during lessons:

> War is shown as either a good or bad thing depending on your point of view...In my personal opinion war is bad, throwing threats around like Henry does nowadays would get you killed or start proper wars with other people or nations. It is never good to lose a life, so why lose so many in pointless battles over oil and stuff like that.

There is a moment in Ade's essay where, interestingly, he draws parallels between the inspirational nature of Henry's speechmaking to rally his troops before the battle at Harfleur and the skills of a preacher: 'Henry [says] a brilliant speech, it was almost like he was preaching. Henry's words give him and his soldiers hope'. Faith and specific religious references recur as part of student-led classroom discourse in Beth's multi-ethnic year 10 group, a discursive feature surfacing in my interviews with them too (as discussed earlier). I suggest that this isolated comment in Ade's otherwise conventionally objective writing might be a reflection of the way readings have been constructed as part of a collaborative social process.

One by-product of the KS3 National Literacy Strategy (DfEE, 2001) has been that a greater assessment focus is put on the identification and analysis of linguistic features in texts. Indeed, in the list of possible assessment foci for the KS3 Shakespeare SATs at the time of my research, 'the language of the text' is offered as an apparently stand-alone alternative to 'character and motivation', 'ideas,

themes and issues', and 'the text in performance' (QCA, 2002b). This begs a central question as to whether it is possible to separate out language from character (since character as an entity is constructed out of language); or language from ideas, themes and issues, particularly in Renaissance drama where action and ideas are inextricably bound up in speech, 'a multivocal mode of dramatic perception' (Ryan, 2002, p.33). Nevertheless, although in the model of reading proposed by the QCA these separations are supposedly possible, as I have argued elsewhere (Coles, 2003) the published mark schemes require a degree of close language analysis regardless of the identified focus of the question. Hence teachers' promotion of the rather artificial PEE formula, where every point made in an essay is accompanied by a quotation from the text. This is most marked at KS3 but, as the students' interviews testify, is also prevalent at GCSE. I think the effect of this is three-fold: firstly it forces teachers back to teaching the conventional text-focused 'lit crit' style and structure which arose out of New Criticism; secondly, it tends to nudge students towards a 'right answer' approach to interpretation; thirdly, it encourages the kind of compilation of quotation lists and charts which I observed in classrooms, designed to 'support' the construction of essays. So, for example, several students repeat Pip's assertion (as part of class discussion and in her writing frame) that Romeo uses soft sounds to talk about love and hard sounds to talk about hate. Now, this may be true, but when I read or hear the lines 'O she doth teach the torches to burn bright! /It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night/As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear...' (Act 1 sc.5, ll43-5) the t-sound at the end of the initial couplet is not the most significant feature in my attempt to make meaning. Yet, Ezekiel is not alone in his claim that 'the T at the end of the sentences makes a soft sound so the audience would believe he's in love'. This method of selecting isolated (and somewhat randomised) minutiae from which to draw generalised conclusions leads to a fragmented sense of the play; in writing about one scene only it makes it more difficult for students to make linguistic and thematic connections (for example, patterns of antithesis) that help to pull the play together as a whole.

From the evidence of the sampled essays, Marie's structured classroom approach to compiling lists and charts matching points and quotations in the set scenes pays dividends when it comes to writing a formulaic SATs essay. Even though writing the essays under test conditions, the Eastgate year 9 students in my sample say very similar things about who holds the balance of power: that Macbeth holds power in dealing with the murderers (Act 3, sc 1); that Lady Macbeth holds the power in the next scene as she tries to calm Macbeth's nerves; that Banquo's ghost holds power over Macbeth in the Banquet scene (Act 3, sc 4). This means that normally lower achieving students such as Mehmet and Carlos are able to construct a relatively coherent answer in SATs terms. Here, for example, is an extract from Mehmet's essay:

> In act 3 scene 2 lady Macbeth is showing her powers by forcing Macbeth not to think about the past & forget them and look forward too the meeting they are going to have. For eg "come on; gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks; Be bright and jovial among your guest tonight"

In contrast, the small sample of Parkside year 9 students' essays tend to be less uniform in content and structure, but more confused. So, for example, the third and penultimate paragraph of Gurmeet's essay reads:

> In Act 5 scene 4 you only feel bad for Macbeth because they are planning against him, on the other hand you would feel good because he deserves it. SIWARD says we learn no other but the confident tyrant (Macbeth) keeps still in Dunsinane. (they are the wood).

Sid opens his essay by telling us, 'I feel very sympathetic for Macbeth as lady macbeth is trying to confuse maccbeth that he didn't kill Duncan'. The evidence from my sample of year 9 essays would suggest that routinised elements to classroom practice that are both text and test focused support more successful production of formulaic test essays.

5.3 Cultural reproduction - Shakespeare projects: One other form of writing produced by Parkside year 9 students as part of their unit of work on *Macbeth* is in

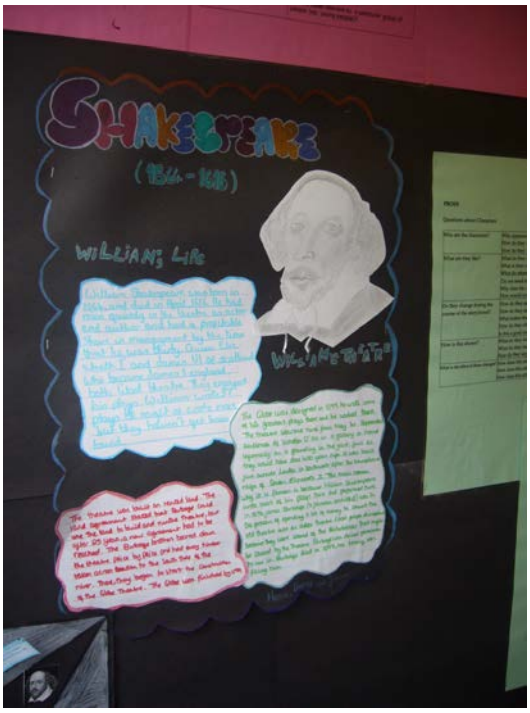
the shape of non-assessed display posters. At Parkside, access to the text of *Macbeth* (whether on film or on the page) is deferred until the year 9 students have been inducted into the life and times of Shakespeare. Felicity's opening lesson begins with the question, 'What prior knowledge do we have about Shakespeare?' following which she conducts a sustained whole-class teacher-led session on the origins of Shakespeare's theatre, concluding with a BBC education video about the Globe and a homework to research Tudor dates and the number of plays Shakespeare wrote. In the second lesson, spent in the Library, Felicity sets up what is posed as a research project lasting for most of the five lessons following the opening one (lessons 2 - 6). Working in groups of four, the students are asked to produce a display of Shakespeare's life and times on sugar paper and give a brief oral presentation in the sixth lesson. On the face of it, this group project suggests a collaborative approach to learning, but what is produced by the groups of students at the end of over four hours' work suggests a sustained lack of engagement and a complete disconnectedness with the topic.

In the one project lesson I was able to observe (the 3rd on the project, a lesson taken by a cover teacher), most students spent the time talking in their groups about various topics including football, soaps and the latest reality TV show (*Celebrity Big Brother*), while one member of each group slowly produced the word 'Shakespeare' in bubble writing. The cover teacher occasionally circulated around the groups in an effort to refocus their work. Exchanges such as the following were fairly typical:

> **S:** Miss, have you seen *Nip/Tuck* [a television series]?
> **T:** Shakespeare! Shakespeare! The greatest playwright ever! [taps the sugar paper in front of the student]

In the end, only one finished poster was put on display by Felicity (poster 1 in the sequence). It's an interesting choice in terms of its iconography, a key visual feature being a student copy of the totemic Martin Droeshout engraving.

Figure 5a: poster 1 (Shakespeare Project)



The prominent position of this poster, behind the teacher's desk on the front wall of the classroom, implies status and authority, a metaphorical bust of Shakespeare surveying the classroom. Three pieces of handwriting, each in different coloured ink, describe 'William's Life' and 'William's Theatre'. The following extract is taken from the first half of the handwritten text, 'William's Life':

> William Shakespeare was born in 1564 and died in April 1616. He had risen quickly in the theatre as actor and author and had a profitable share in management by the time that he was thirty. Queen Elizabeth I and James VI of Scotland who became James I england both liked theatre. They enjoyed his plays. William wrote 37 plays….

The use of Shakespeare's first name effectively serves to domesticate and contain, an echo, perhaps, of twenty-first century youth culture that abbreviates famous people's names in a gesture of fake familiarity, possibly invoking a similar celebrity status for Shakespeare. The style of writing, however, is objective and detached in tone, containing phrases quite unlike anything these year 9 students uttered in the

classroom or wrote in their SATs practice essays. Numerical facts (dates and numbers reminiscent of Felicity's opening question and answer session in lesson 1) jostle for random space with assertions that gloss over ten or more years of Shakespeare's productive life. An interesting feature in the second extract below ('Wiiliam's Theatre') is the way the students have slipped between sources describing the original Globe and what presumably refers to the modern Globe, probably copied from the Globe website:

> William's Theatre
>
> The Globe was designed in 1599 he wrote some of his greatest plays there. The theatre seasons runs from May to September, audiences of 'Wooden O' sit in a gallery or stand informally as a groundlings in the yard, just as they would have 400 years ago. It was built just outside London in Southwark after the triumphant reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The main reason it is famous is because William wrote most of his plays there….

This temporal slippage suggests either a lack of attention or confusion on the part of the students. For a similar reason, I want to turn attention now to poster number 2.

Figure 5b: poster 2 (Shakespeare Project)

Illustrated by five miniature portraits of Shakespeare (one in each corner and at the end of the piece of text towards the top right), the name 'Shakespeare' and the dates of his birth and death take up the majority of the space in large bubble-style writing. Two pieces of printed text are pasted in between, both of which have clearly been indiscriminately downloaded from an internet site. The second extract begins with this irrelevance, for instance:

> It is hoped that the sites linked here will prove useful to those wishing to mount Shakespearean productions. Finally in a departure from the earlier format of these pages, information has been mounted here. If you are a producer and wish your production information to be added to this page, use the email link on the navigation menu above to write to me…..

These are students who, despite the chance to work collaboratively (a rare opportunity to work creatively remembered positively by students during interviews), have remained resolutely disconnected from the object of their study.

Most of the posters prominently feature the dates of Shakespeare's birth and death; other aspects featured are time-lines, family trees and lists of play titles (for example, poster number 3). In this way the posters represent a clear extension of the teacher-led content of the opening lesson, where dates, random 'facts' and lists of play titles are privileged as 'what we know about Shakespeare'.

Figure 5c: poster 3 (Shakespeare Project)

No poster contains more than 300 words and few include detailed art-work. Indeed, the fourth group did not complete their poster.

Through this project, reading Shakespeare is constructed as induction into a historical body of knowledge, a body of knowledge that is both historically and culturally disconnected from the students' lives. For example, there are no references to Shakespeare in popular culture; no references to film versions of plays, no sense that Shakespeare might be construed by 'ordinary people' as entertainment. As already discussed, a strong theme emerging from students' interview comments is that Shakespeare is the preserve of 'posh' people, a view which has not been dented for the Parkside year 9 class by researching the theatre of Shakespeare's day.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS

In this final chapter, I want to return to my main research questions as outlined in Chapter 3, specifically attending to what seem to me to be vexing questions about exactly what it means in National Curriculum terms to 'read' a Shakespeare 'text' and how this plays out in the two Eastgate and Parkside classrooms I visited. My interpretation of the lessons I observed and of subsequent interviews with participants as outlined in Chapters 4 and 5 not only challenges a number of the claims made about 'active Shakespeare' – or, at least, suggests that any benefits are fragile ones - but equally points to the inadequacy of most liberal-left arguments about cultural entitlement and the transformative effects of compulsory Shakespeare. The latter, I think, is particularly true in the complex social spaces of urban classrooms.

6.1 'Reading' Shakespeare

Realist notions of character inherited from Bradley, are strongly marked in three out of the four classrooms in my study; the kind of thematic overviews associated with the *Scrutiny* project are offered as neat interpretations at various points by Marie and Pip. For instance, in the fifth *Romeo and Juliet* lesson I observed, Pip summed up 'the meaning' of the play in a way which not only encapsulates her whole approach, but also closely echoes the conventional constructions of school Shakespeare I outlined in Chapter 2:

> So, it's about characters, it's about themes, it's about emotions that are expressed in the play that people can relate to as much now as they could do back then. Everybody's been in love, everyone's been hurt, everyone's had an argument with somebody they're close to...

The tendency to 'tell' students what the text 'means' occurs in all four classrooms. Here in Pip's classroom relevance to students' own lives is, in the end, reduced to apparently 'universal' felt emotions, a set of connections which sidesteps messy questions of cultural (dis)continuities.

Leavis' concept of a literary text as a stable and transparent entity maintains a tenacious grip in school contexts. Any attempt to make Shakespeare accessible and engaging by employing non-traditional methods (whether they be through the medium of drama, moving image or digital technology) remains located within a curricular paradigm that constructs Shakespeare very specifically as part of the literary canon, with all the attendant cultural baggage and traditions that Shakespeare has accrued, or 'incrustations' to use Evans' visually graphic term (Evans, 1989, p.34). The National Curriculum not only continues to place Literature at the heart of English but also constructs the act of reading as a solitary endeavour undertaken 'independently' by skilled individuals (DfEE/QCA, 1999, p. 34)[47]. As is immediately obvious this curricular notion of reading is clearly inappropriate in practice since the majority of 'reading' in Eastgate and Parkside classrooms is communal rather than solitary. Furthermore, despite the nod towards non-canonical and multi-media texts, the ghostly fingerprint of Leavis indelibly marks the pages of the curriculum document in its aims to construct readers who are 'discriminating' and 'appreciating' in the way they approach texts, who are able to 'extract' meaning and 'understand the author's craft' (p.34). At Level 5 (the benchmark level of attainment for the end of Key Stage 3), pupils are to 'show understanding', 'select essential points' and 'identify key features' (p.57), a focus on identification of literary devices and key quotations which only intensifies as pupils progress. It is of little surprise, therefore, that so few encounters with literary texts are of an 'aesthetic' nature in secondary English classrooms (Dias and Hayhoe, 1988; Dymoke, 2007), and how much is dominated by a functional 'efferent' approach. Felicity's study of *Macbeth* with her year 9s is

[47] The millennium version, published in 1999, was still current at the time of my lesson observations

almost entirely formed within notions of correctness right from the first contact with the text; Marie's opening lesson on *Macbeth* begins in an interactive, exploratory way through group improvisation yet ends with a closed reading of Act 1, scene 1, and her overall scheme of work relies heavily on listing and charting bits of information; even at GCSE level Pip's approach to *Romeo and Juliet* is largely concerned with providing her year 10 students with recyclable 'facts' about characters, language and events suitable for writing a coursework essay about Act 1, scene 5.

Yet the benefits of 'doing' Shakespeare in school are commonly argued to be so that young people can appreciate the universal beauty of the poetry (Haddon, 2009), to enrich their emotional life (Thomas, 2007), to be 'enraptured' (Gove, 2010), little of which is evident in the classrooms I observed, the essays students write or comments they make in interview. There are, of course, some significant exceptions and I discuss these later. My analysis in Chapter 4 demonstrates that Shakespeare is constructed primarily in these four classrooms as a body of hard knowledge, so difficult that it has to be broken up, reduced to manageable chunks and heavily mediated by the teacher. It, thus, becomes a process more akin to Nick Gibb's vision of education (cited at the beginning of Chapter 1) as the monologic transmission of high cultural knowledge, rather than even the personal growth model apparently embraced by so many English teachers (Goodwyn, 2010, Bousted, 2000). It is striking that students in Parkside and Eastgate classrooms are rarely asked for their 'personal response' to the play being studied.

My research data also suggest that it is perfectly possible for a narrowly authoritative notion of text to co-exist with 'active approaches', evidenced by, for example, Marie's frequent retreat from interactive, drama-based explorations into a controlling set of discursive practices that ultimately preserve the authority of the text. Of course, the constricting parameters of either KS3 or GCSE assessment regimes mean that teachers such as Marie and Beth in particular are

working in conditions that are not of their choosing (as they make clear in their interview comments). It is important not to underestimate the constraints under which English teachers currently work; all lesson observations and all pupil responses in my data must be viewed through this prism. Where connections are made with students' own beliefs, experiences and lives outside school (which happens most frequently during episodes of collaborative, drama-based activity which I discuss below), meanings may be generated in a more culturally engaged way. But for the purposes of assessment, whether at KS3 or KS4, students are being 'apprenticed' into specific literacy practices (Gee, 2012, p.41), ways of interacting with a Shakespeare text where a technicist approach leads to the accumulation of a set of decontextualised individual skills. Thus, for many of the students I interviewed, Shakespeare study appears to be as much about procedural aspects of assignment structure (the ubiquitous PEE) as it is about creating and contesting meanings. Although the rigid testing regime of the KS3 SATs no longer applies in English schools, the fact that both year 9 and year 10 teachers in my study adopt similar approaches suggests that the apparently more open-ended possibilities of coursework as an assessment mode are, ultimately, illusory in the broader context of increased accountability and a narrow managerialist conception of 'school improvement' developed by New Labour governments from the late 1990s onwards (Wrigley, 2002).

6.2 What counts as a 'text'?

What counts as a (literary) text in these classrooms is an important question to ask, particularly since all four teachers in my study use moving image adaptations of specific Shakespeare texts in the classroom, as I outlined in Chapter 4. Significantly, the film or video version in each case is the only 'complete' format in which the students encounter their particular play, whilst the printed text is reconstituted by the teacher into a series of fragments. My research data afford some interesting insights into how teachers construct the cultural and historical relationship between playtext and adaptation within the classroom, and the way

students are positioned as readers of the different textual modes, as I want to discuss below.

As noted by Burn (2010), film's relationship with English has been hindered historically by condescending attitudes towards the mass media inherited from Leavis (for example, Leavis and Thompson, 1933). The primacy of printed literary texts within the National Curriculum has been preserved from its earliest incarnation in 1989 to the present day. Indeed, during the consultation period leading up to the current version of the English orders (QCA, 2007), the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority made it clear that when considering what 'culture' means this was no oversight, asserting that 'in English, the literary heritage is centrally important' (QCA, 2005, p.8). Nevertheless, not only are all four teachers in my study emphatic about the value of using film versions, but the majority of their students also express appreciation of film as a resource (evidenced in interview and questionnaire data). A statement from Film Education (2010) points out the potentially rich and dynamic relationship between film adaptations of Shakespeare and the playtexts themselves:

> Film...is a popular medium and by teaching young people the critical skills with which to deconstruct both directors' interpretations of Shakespeare's texts and the texts themselves, teachers have an opportunity to approach the subject afresh. The combination of classic texts reconstructed by modern filmmakers goes to the heart of the debate about the position of Shakespeare in schools and provides teachers with a rich source of stimulus material for their students (p.5).

Watching film is a cultural practice familiar to most young people. Interestingly, it emerges as one of the cultural fields which cut across boundaries of class, gender, age and ethnicity in Bennett et al's (2009) research into class and culture. As such it offers an opportunity to place Shakespeare plays on a cultural continuum which connects with students' lives outside of school. However, all four teachers in my study are most concerned by more practical issues of 'access' when considering film adaptations. So, Beth chooses Branagh's version of *Henry V* because it is 'pretty accessible'; Pip talks about Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* in terms of

modernisation and relevance, and, along with Marie, states that a film aids pupils' understanding of the plot and characters. Felicity is critical of the RSC video production of *Macbeth* for being less accessible (she calls it 'the big turn-off') and in interview regrets using it with her class, suggesting that this televised stage production is appropriate for top sets only. Holderness (1985) suggests that the act of adaptation, reconstructing Shakespeare for screen, is potentially a radical process which disrupts conventional ways of reading and thinking about the text. But I think that the way in which film is employed in these classrooms may well achieve the opposite, by suggesting that this specific production represents 'the' authoritative interpretation of the text. A similar point is made by Durran and Morrison (2004) in their article outlining alternative ways of working with film:

> Conventional ways of using film with Shakespeare present some problems...watching a single version of a Shakespeare play can flesh out the story for pupils in a way that constrains the imagination...such films are still generally read as extended, linear works, positioning the viewer through the force of narrative (p.17).

My interview data indicate that English teachers appreciate the importance of performance, and welcome the benefit of film in providing easy classroom access to a professional performance of the complete play. However, across these classrooms film's role is subordinated as a cultural form, pressed into service as a simplified substitute for the 'real thing'. The notion of textual authority is strongly marked, undisturbed by use of film text. Although Pip begins the unit of work on *Romeo and Juliet* by making links with her students' existing cultural knowledge of popular film, this is abandoned once the text itself is introduced. Even in Beth's classroom, Branagh's film text is supplanted by fragments of printed text once students begin to write their (heavily scaffolded) GCSE coursework essay. Despite at least three of the four teachers clearly feeling committed to enabling students to interpret the play for themselves, the majority of the lessons I recorded in both schools frequently position the students passively in the reading process and strongly suggest that there is ultimately a 'correct' way of thinking about the play, one which students need to reproduce in their exam or coursework essays. Film is

relegated to a low-status supporting role in relation to the high status printed text. When interviewed, Pip and Marie are even slightly defensive about showing the film, suggesting that this is somehow not a valid part of English lessons. For example, Pip says, 'You always feel a bit of a cop-out teacher if you're showing the video, but I do think they do get so much out of it'. A common theme running through each of the teacher interviews is that film's main purpose is to provide a sense of the plot and the main characters, so that only small sections of the printed text need to be read. The phrase 'filling in' is used in this context by more than one teacher, putting film very much in its place.

By way of contrast, a radically different relationship between film and playtext is constructed by Durran and Morrison (2004). In their work in a Cambridge comprehensive school, book and film (in this case, *Macbeth* or *Romeo and Juliet*) are afforded parity and taught side by side:

> Film does not just serve the study of literature...each film version asks students to consider its own textual structure, and the reasons for its construction (p.19).

This study suggests that systematic analysis of film, an exercise in 'close technical reading – both of film and of Shakespeare' (p.17), encourages students to study the printed playtext more closely, a conclusion leant support by Bousted and Ozturk (2004) in their work with undergraduates reading *Silas Marner* alongside a film version. Burn (2010, p.356) concludes that this kind of comparative teaching, drawing on both media and literary critical traditions, 'implies a parity of cultural value, rather than a hierarchy privileging literature'.

It is easy to see how such an approach might work in Beth's or Pip's Year 10 classrooms, serving to give prominence to the specific social and historical context of production (Goodwyn, 2004). Students could begin to explore how *Henry V* or *Romeo and Juliet* has been re-read and re-interpreted at different historical moments, and adapted to fit new modes of production whether theatrical, literary or digital. Not only is this pedagogy based on a 'model of literacy that can travel

across semiotic modes and cultural forms' (Durran and Morrison, 2004, p.17), but I would argue it comes much closer to meeting the current National Curriculum's declared aim of helping students appreciate why Shakespeare's plays have remained 'influential and significant over time' (QCA, 2007, para 1.3). Unfortunately, any assessment system that purely focuses on the printed text[48] will tend to treat a Shakespeare play solely as a decontextualised book, rather than as a playtext for performance and adaptation. My research indicates how difficult it is for teachers to avoid reproducing traditional readings in the current assessment-focused and performance-driven climate in schools (Ball, 2007).

6.3 'Active Shakespeare'

As discussed in Chapter 4, an understanding of Shakespeare as theatre is rhetorically promoted by all four teachers, accompanied by the employment of drama-based methods by three of them in the classroom. Even within Marie's classroom, however, where over two thirds of her lessons include substantial drama-based episodes (and where drama terminology is embedded most frequently in classroom discourse), the construction of Shakespeare as drama is not robust enough to shake students' conception of *Macbeth* as a book, as evidenced by students' interviews and written essays. But on a number of occasions, drama's potential for enabling students to collaborate in the production of meanings around an aspect of a playtext is clearly illustrated. In both Marie's and Beth's classrooms in particular, drama offers an opportunity where students can be seen to draw on their own cultural resources within a social, imaginative and physical framework, most marked in improvisation and role play activities. This multi-layered collaborative knowledge is constructed over time, across lessons both within and outside of drama-based activities, as seen, for instance, when in Beth's classroom links are made between role-plays which focus on the figure of King Henry, and wider class discussion.

[48] As even the reformed modular GCSE syllabi continue to do within the new Controlled Assessment format which has replaced coursework

Much of the literature which promotes 'active Shakespeare' and makes grand claims about the educational experience (for example, Thomas, 2007; Haddon, 1995; Winston and Tandy, 2012; Salvatore, 2010) fails to make any clear distinction between the generic contribution drama as a pedagogy makes to learning, and the specific purpose of Shakespeare taught in this way. But I believe this distinction is an important one to make. It is generally accepted that educational drama has unique value in the way it enriches - and inter-relates with - the English curriculum (Franks, 1999; Bunyan and Moore, 200; Cremin et al., 2006; Franks et al., 2006), and in what it contributes in its own right to the secondary curriculum as a whole (Neelands, 2009; Fleming, 2012). Any consideration of the positive aspects of teaching Shakespeare, therefore, needs to be separated out from the emotional, social and intellectual benefits attributed to drama *per se* (as either an arts subject or as a method). Neelands' analysis of 'ensemble-based' drama as an 'egalitarian' and essentially 'social' mode (Neelands, 2009) is powerfully articulated:

> A powerful integrative force for bringing unfamiliar knowledge into knowing engagement...helping students to make contextual and authentic connections between the abstractions of an English National Curriculum and the heartbeat of their own lives and experiences... (p.175).

Drama that can enable students to make connections between the cultural practices of their own lives and the somewhat inert cultural diet of the 'literary heritage' in school holds a particular potency in challenging the regulated distribution of cultural capital that underpins National Curriculum Shakespeare. Franks (1999, pp.39-40) argues persuasively that drama as an 'active mode of meaning making' is 'always about social encounters'. Its value to the teaching of Shakespeare, it seems to me, is specifically in its capacity to rupture the default construction of the reader as a lone, sensitive individual and replace it with a more dynamic understanding of readers' inter-relationships with each other and with the text. So, in Beth's class we saw students jointly involved in using whole-class

role-play to predict what the Dauphin's gift might be, followed by individualised writing in role to predict Henry's response, ideas that are generated, shared and developed in a classroom space that is open and collaborative. It is in the interplay between moving image text and classroom drama that Beth succeeds in decentring the authoritative text, a cultural move which is sustained until the formal requirements of written assessment impinge. In Marie's classroom, the classroom space is explicitly transformed into a performance space on a number of occasions, on one occasion the teacher miming a spotlight as each group in turn take their place centre-stage. In these moments, I would argue that Marie and her year 9 class are experiencing a changed relationship with the canonical artefact that is *Macbeth,* where readers are actively producing and enacting meanings for an audience that has material reality. When Marie's class are engaged in improvisations or tableaux the students can be seen to be drawing on shared cultural knowledge which has the potential to help them make connections between the rarefied, archaic language of the printed text and the immediacy of their physicalised interpretations (Franks, 2003). The production and exchange of ideas that happen during some of these drama-based episodes are more dialogically realised in a way that rarely happens within the all too common I-R-F structure of whole-class 'discussion'. Students' own articulation of why they value drama reveals that many of them sense that this is happening, although as I suggested in my analysis of interview data in Chapter 5, I think significant tensions remain in the effect that role play can have in focusing students' attention on realist conceptions of character and apparently universal themes.

Finally, the crucial difference between the way 'active Shakespeare' is manifested in Beth's classroom and in Pip's is in the conception of reading. Critical literacy work with literature students in New Zealand by Locke and Cleary (2011) leads the authors to conclude that:

> calling on prior knowledge and putting the students in a position of 'power' – that is, the idea that students have important knowledge to share – proved to be a valuable teaching strategy (p.135).

In Beth's class, students' own cultural lives form a reference point as they explore aspects of *Henry V*, but not in a way which reduces ideas to trite 'universals'. My research suggests that it is under these conditions, allied to a socio-cultural view of reading, that 'active Shakespeare' has the greatest potential to be transformative as a pedagogical approach.

6.4 Cultural entitlement and cultural capital

The last issue I want to return to is that of Shakespeare's weighty cultural baggage and what I see as the importance of acknowledging it openly with students in classrooms. As I suggested in Chapter 5, I am convinced that we need to provide students with the curriculum space to explore what Shakespeare signifies to them and what the National Curriculum means by 'cultural heritage'. There are several moments in my lesson transcripts which might have acted as cues for some critical exploration: Emma and Zufie's naive questions which reflect Shakespeare's mythical status in Felicity's class (sequence 4(42)); Muna's provocative challenge to Shakespeare's iconic reputation in Pip's lesson (sequence 4(43)); Ade and Owsun's exaggerated refusal to even try to understand a straightforward piece of Shakespeare text in Beth's lesson (sequence 4(48)). From the evidence I have presented in preceding chapters, I would contend that 'active methods' on their own, whilst rendering Shakespeare lessons more enjoyable, are unlikely to be sufficient to introduce the notion that 'Shakespeare' is a site of debate and contestation.

Jonothan Neelands (2005) argues that there has never been a better time to be teaching Shakespeare, given the range of drama approaches and technological resources available to teachers. He promotes a 'pro-social' (2009, p.175) drama approach, similar to the 'rehearsal room' strategy underpinning the RSC's work in schools. This he claims is not only able to connect students' lives in the real world with abstract forms of knowledge associated with school learning, but also capable of 'critiquing' cultural power and 'redistributing' cultural capital

(Neelands, 2008, p.13). However, as reports of the RSC's LPN initiative indicate, breaking down cultural barriers is not that simple. Although survey results reported by Galloway and Strand (2010) indicated that the RSC's LPN interventions significantly raised the percentage of students agreeing that Shakespeare was fun and reduced the proportion who state that they found the plays difficult to understand, the authors concede that there was no significant change in overall attitude amongst the student participants. Indeed, Galloway and Strand go on to comment that, 'The results demonstrate how hard it is to effect change in quite deep seated negative attitudes to Shakespeare' (2010, p.25). My qualitative interview data lead me to the same conclusion. But I believe that my qualitative approach enables me to unpick this 'deep seated' antipathy in more depth than Galloway and Strand's quantitative survey data.

An emergent pattern arising out of interviews with Eastgate and Parkside students is a lack of intellectual confidence in the face of Shakespeare's iconic reputation as a genius and as the ultimate in exam texts. It is the idea that Shakespeare has the potential to validate an individual's intellectual worth that seems most to disempower some of the students I interviewed. For them, Shakespeare remains an artefact identified with 'boffins' or 'posh' people's lives. Yet the 'democratic entitlement' argument I outlined in Chapter 1 claims that compulsory school Shakespeare should break down these distinctions by offering universal access to those cultural forms associated with privilege. Unfortunately, for many of the students in my study, Shakespeare packaged as reified school knowledge rather than as part of a broad cultural experience means that the classroom encounter for the most part leaves initial preconceptions intact. I am reminded of Bourdieu's argument that our relationship with cultural forms depends upon the circumstances in which we experience it, 'because the act whereby culture is communicated is, as such, the exemplary expression of a certain type of relation to the culture' (Bourdieu, 1976b, p.198). It is no wonder that Chris, Annie and Graham confidently take Shakespeare in their stride, with cultural lives that more closely match the official version of 'culture' as reflected in Government policy

documents (see, for example, DCMS/DCSF, 2008, Henley, 2012). Responses from other year 9 and 10 students suggest that the extent to which they feel that Shakespeare is part of their own cultural heritage is highly variable, despite repeated curriculum forays into the plays or into Shakespeare's life and times from primary school onwards.

My qualitative data certainly suggest that the current Government's proposed redistribution of cultural capital through a great books approach to curriculum reform is unlikely to be the straightforward process suggested by politicians. Although the most recent Government-commissioned report into 'cultural education', the Henley Review (2012), supports active production of cultural forms within the school curriculum, it constructs culture as something to be 'taught' as much as experienced. In the pages of the Review culture is constructed first and foremost as knowledge (3.13) to be appreciated (3.14), and as something likely to be lacking from children's lives who come from 'deprived backgrounds' (3.7). I would argue that the packaging of Shakespeare or other canonical writers into inert parcels of curriculum knowledge does little to relieve this 'deprivation'. Indeed, in demanding that all young people have 'equal access' to Shakespeare, policy-makers create the false expectation that students will relate to it in undifferentiated ways, whatever their social and economic background. What is a matter of cultural difference is thus transformed by means of school assessment systems into questions about individual performance (both on the part of students and their teachers). Ironically, in his history of working class readers of Shakespeare, Andrew Murphy (2008) suggests that mass education itself has helped to distance Shakespeare from the cultural lives of ordinary people by constructing the plays as objects of academic study. He reminds us that nineteenth century Chartists adopted Shakespeare as 'almost a kind of literary patron saint' (Murphy, 2008, p.139) at a time when 'access' seemed not to be a problem for working class readers of Shakespeare. Whereas Chartists were able to take voluntary ownership of Shakespeare, appropriating it and making it a transformative part of their cultural lives, today's young people are positioned as

consumers within the school system, and only allowed a highly regulated and ultimately dissatisfying encounter which is not on their terms.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Letter of introduction to Headteacher

The Headteacher
Eastgate School
London XXX

Dear XXX

Re: English Curriculum Research Project

I understand that Beth Jones has already spoken to you about the research I am currently conducting into the way KS3 and KS4 students in urban comprehensive schools respond to Shakespeare. I am a former English teacher and deputy headteacher, now lecturing in Education at Goldsmiths College and registered for my doctoral research at Kings College. I have informally approached Beth about the possibility of observing a year 9 class (in the Spring Term) and a year 10 class (in the Summer Term) when they are studying their 'set' Shakespeare text. I am writing to formally request permission from you and to take the opportunity to forward some additional details about my background and about the research project itself.

Please find enclosed a short CV and an article from the journal *Changing English* which is based on earlier research I conducted, but which indicates the areas in which I am interested. A particular focus of my research is how young people in urban classrooms negotiate the official, national view of Culture imposed by the National Curriculum. I want to look at how particular groups of students make sense of a Shakespeare text and to examine evidence of what kinds of interpretive devices they might employ.

The research project has the interaction of students in classrooms as its focus. I would want to observe and video a sample of lessons taught over the period of each Shakespeare scheme of work. The research would also require me to interview a small selection of students from each class at a later date. All video, audio and written data would be treated as confidential, seen only by participants themselves, my PhD supervisor at Kings and eventually published in a way which preserves the anonymity of the school, the individual teachers and all students who take part. I am philosophically committed to sharing the findings of the project with the school at various stages of the research. I hope that the findings may be of benefit to the school and all those who take part.

If you are happy for the research to go ahead, all participants will, of course, need to give their consent, and to understand that they may withdraw their consent at any time. It is normal practice for a participating school to send a letter home for the specific classes under study, briefly explaining the nature of the research.

I am keen to work with staff and students at Eastgate School because I know that the English Department is innovative in its approach to classroom practice and because of the

school's reputation for maximising success for students from a wide range of ethnic and social backgrounds.

I would, of course, be more than willing to come into school to discuss the project further with you if necessary. My contact details are enclosed.

Yours sincerely

Jane Coles

Cc. Beth Jones, Head of English

Appendix B: Letter to parents/carers

Template letter used at Eastgate School

Dear Parent/Carer

Shakespeare in Schools: Research Project

As you may already know, Eastgate School is taking part in a research project based at the University of London. The project is looking at the teaching of Shakespeare in London Schools, the way pupils respond to different teaching methods and what sense pupils make of a 'set' play.

Jane Coles, the researcher from the University, is a former English teacher herself. She would like to video some year 9 English lessons, then interview a small sample of pupils about their experience of studying *Macbeth* for their SATs test. Interviews would be carried out in small groups of 4 or 5 pupils together (in school time) and will last approximately 30 minutes. The interviews will be audio-taped. All recordings will remain confidential to the researchers. We have assurances that neither the school, nor any pupil will be identified by their real name in any research report which arises out of the project.

If you have any objection to your daughter/son being filmed in class or taking part in the research project interviews, please let me know as soon as possible using the tear-off slip below.

Thank you in anticipation of your support. Please note that, once the project gets underway, you will be able to withdraw consent on behalf of your daughter/son at any point. If you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact me at school.

Yours faithfully

English Teacher

……

I do not wish my son/daughter to be filmed in class or interviewed as part of the Shakespeare in Schools research project.

NAME of PUPIL: .....

SIGNED.....(Parent/Carer)

Appendix C: Lesson sequence for each class

('T' indicates lesson selected for full transcription)

C1. Eastgate: Year 9 sequence of lessons		
Lesson obs no.	**Lesson no in sequence**	**Main details** *stated lesson objectives in bold (lessons are of 1 hr 45mins)*
Mac1 11 Jan 05 **T**	1 but class watched Polanski film in cover lessons last week	**'Intro to Macbeth: consolidation of plot/intro to the main themes'** a) intro activity based on themes (eg treachery, betrayal, power, bravery etc). Role plays in small groups. b) What do you know about *Macbeth*? Whole-class recall of plot from watching film; sorting exercise in pairs. SATs test forms framework – referenced by T. c) Read 1st scene, Ss taking parts. Clap out rhythm; reference to heartbeat by T. T. concludes with "So, the witches symbolise the unnatural in the play".
Mac2 25 Jan **T**	4 prev lesson cancelled – mock SATs writing test	[only half lesson: extended careers assembly] **'what happens in Act 1, sc 4? What does this tell us about Lady Macbeth?'** a) reading Act 1 sc4: T. selects readers; T. makes ref. to stage conventions (eg aside) b) T. picks out 2 Macbeths to act out key lines – 2 sides of Macbeth. c) Factfile pro formas – Ss fill out
Mac3 8 Feb	6	**'What does the SATs paper contain? How does Macbeth manipulate the murderers in Act 3, sc1? Quote finding and PEE practice'**. a) skills for SATs tests (eg quote finding, PEE) b) reading circle: Act 3, sc1 c) worksheet: how Macbeth manipulates murderers. Table to complete – explanation and find quote. d) Discussion re moral question of killing in time of war vs murder e) A3 sheets based on key scenes – differentiated on 3 levels (colour coded) – individual work (diagram: point>quote>explanation). T. explains this is vital SATs work.
Mac4 22 Feb	8 after half term	**'Read Act 3, sc1,2,3; consider key imagery; continue SATs preparation'** a) resumption of individual A3 sheets. T. refers to SATs test. b) Discussion of imagery in Act 2 c) Ss listen to CD Act 3 sc1, following in texts d) T. what's happening in this scene? Recap, plus ref to point, quote, explanation. e) Back to A3 sheets (15-20 mins) f) T. "Let's move on, otherwise we'll all kill ourselves with boredom". Act3, sc2 – CD, plus texts: T. asks Ss to listen out for nature imagery – pooled on board.
Mac5 25 Feb	9	**'Read Act 3, sc4; practise PEE skills; direct the scene'.** a) T refs her own visit to theatre previous night, talks of 'audience' reaction. b) Reading Act 3, sc 3 and sc4 – T selects Ss to read parts c) Pairs drama work: M and LM quotes. Spotlight on pairs. d) PEE practice sheets – work in pairs. e) Watching TV documentary about directing Macbeth.
Mac6 1 Mar **T**	10	**'using drama to revise set scenes; preparing for timed practice test essay'** a) drama activity – tableaux: lines taken from set scenes b) essay prep grid. Ss work in groups c) final 'game': competition to create the best Macbeth/L.Macbeth costume out of newspapers (small groups).

- Observed: 6 out of 11 lessons (total approx 9hrs 30mins)
- 4/6 lessons include drama-based approaches

C2. Parkside: Year 9 sequence of lessons

Lesson obs no.	Lesson no in sequence	Main details *stated lesson objectives in bold* *(lessons are of 1 hour)*
Mac1 16 Jan **T**	1	**'What prior knowledge do we have about Shakespeare?'** a) Pooled ideas on board; b) T recounts history of theatre in England; c) watch English File video about Shakespeare's Globe.
Mac2 23 Jan	4	[Ss have by now watched more background video; working on group projects, research lesson in lib.] Cover teacher. **'How do we present our material about Shp?'** a) Groups with sugar paper – bubble writing etc.
Mac3 30 Jan **T**	7	**'How does Shakespeare intro us to the character of Macbeth?'** a) Q/A: is Macbeth fact or fiction? b) T tells history of real Macbeth. c) Read character studies in Oxford edition d) Reading Act 1, sc1 – emphasis on reading it as verse, students rehearse reading it several times; Act 1, sc2: read with focus on punctuation. Read round class.
Mac4 6 Feb	10	**'How does Shakespeare describe Macbeth in Act 1?'** [started last lesson; Ss have watched Acts 1 and 2 on video]. a) Ss suggest words to describe Macbeth. Ideas pooled on board. SATs scenes mentioned. b) T asks Qs about prophecies.
Mac5 20 Feb (after half term)	13	[no stated lesson objectives] a) 10 mins recap of plot/characters b) T puts video on. Played up to death of LM without comment.
Mac6 24 Feb **T**	15	[have now finished watching video] **'How do we explore the set scenes?'** a) Ss write down 5 things about the play they remember from the video. b) As a class they reconstruct order of events. Plot summary from Oxford edition given out. Read out act by act synopsis round class. c) Photocopies of set scenes given out. d) H/W: identify new vocabulary in set scenes.
Mac7 24 March	21 Intervening lessons- theatre group in school; other SATs practice	**'How do we write an essay about Macbeth?'** a) Point, quote, comment introduced by T. b) SATs practice paper given out (CGP packs); groups to come up with 6 points, quotes, explanations. c) H/W: write essay using 6 PQC.
Mac8 27 March	22	**'How do we assess our response to the SATs Q?'** a) Groups suggest criteria – pooled on board; peer assessment of h/w. b) Go over as class – T clarifies what each sc is about.
Mac9 24 April (1st lesson back after Easter)	24	Last scheduled lesson before SATs. **'What Qs could be asked about the set scenes?'** a) Ss summarise each set scene; b) groups try to write a possible question; then suggest bullet point answer still in groups. Bell goes so no time for feedback. c) H/W choose another practice Q from CGP packs.

- (T has one last unscheduled lesson with the class immediately prior to the test).
- Observed: 9/25 lessons (total approx 9 hours)
- None of observed lessons include drama-based approaches (although lesson 7 includes rehearsed reading)

C3. Eastgate: Year 10 sequence of lessons		
Lesson obs no.	**Lesson no in sequence**	**Main details** *(stated lesson objectives in bold)* *(Lessons are of 1 hr)*
HV1 1 May **T**	3	**'Impressions of Henry'** d) intro activity: Henry's stage entrance – deconstruction of stage photo e) recap what they've learned about Henry in previous lessons f) T gives out slips: write in that person's voice g) 2 pupils in role (Henry and French ambassador) at front of class – what's in the box? Reactions and predictions.
HV2 3 May	4	[No stated objective?] a) starter: link with last lesson – text marking Henry's speech in pairs b) T reads speech aloud and pools ideas c) Small groups – sequential cards giving messages to King re suspected traitors; groups to decide what they would do d) Hotseating characters/written task
HV3 17 May **T**	9 Bank holiday plus LSBU residential	**'Before the Battle: encouraging the soldiers to fight'**. f) In role of Henry Ss write 3 things they'd say to encourage troops; feedback g) Worksheet on each army's insults/boasts h) Reading Harfleur scene from texts i) T shows Harfleur section of Branagh film
HV4 21 May	11	**'How do you think the play is going to end?'** a) Starter: quick prediction – whole class b) Watch end of film (Branagh version) c) Some whole-class discussion re ending (how peace was established); historical facts and fiction d) Pairs exercise on Shakespeare's portrayal of Henry e) Brief feedback
HV5 25 May **T**	13 last lesson before half term.	**'In your view how is war presented to the audience in the Harfleur scenes of <u>Henry V</u>?'.** f) T intros coursework essay g) Relevant sections of Branagh film viewed: T writes up key points on board as they watch h) T gives out A3 sheets - pairs work i) pairs swap over sheets j) plenary – T summarising

- Observed: 5 out of 13 lessons (total 5 hours)
- 3 out of 5 lessons include drama-based approaches

C4. Parkside: Year 10 sequence of lessons		
Lesson obs no.	**Lesson no in sequence**	**Main details** *(stated lesson objectives are in bold)* *(lessons are of 1 hour)*
R&J1 17 Mar **T**	3	[previously: pooling ideas about story; dramatic narration of story using prologue; background re Globe. This lesson is the first use of the text itself] **'How is the opening of R&J made dramatic?'** a) Ss asked to think of a film which starts dramatically; b) Act 1,sc1 – parts given out; read out loud c) View opening of Baz Luhrman film. Comparison. d) Handout of R's speech re Rosalind – oxymorons, group discussion, feedback.
R&J2 24 Mar **T**	7	[intervening lessons – watching BL film]. **'How does atmosphere change during Act 1, sc5?'** a) Revision of characters – matching exercise on w/sheets; b) groups given different sections of photocopied scene to discuss/act out, T introduces each one separately. c) Groups prepare.
R&J3 27 Mar	8	**'How can my group prepare a successful performance?'** a) T gathers ideas on board for performances; b) groups practise; c) dramatic presentations.
R&J4 3 May	11 after Easter hols; year 10 mock exams etc	[3 weeks since last lesson on R&J] **'What are key characters/events?'** a) Quiz; T goes over answers with whole class. b) Discussion re some issues (eg arranged marriage).
R&J5 12 May **T**	16 (1st lesson back after half term)	[last lesson on R&J before completion of essay as H/W] **'what are the success criteria?'** a) T gives groups sets of criteria to interpret; b) pool on IWB. c) Essay title and detailed frame given out. Relevant info already in ex books – grid and w/sheet on Act 1, sc5. Discussion, Q/A.

- Observed: 5 out of 16 lessons (total of 5 hours)
- 2 out of 5 lessons involve some drama work

Appendix D: Teacher Interview - semi-structured interview schedule

[Establish how long been teaching; how long in this department]

- Have you enjoyed teaching [*name of play*…] this term? What's been the most memorable aspect for you this time with this class?

- Do you think Shakespeare poses any specific problems/difficulties for a class like this? [If set, would you have taught it any differently to a top/bottom set?]

- What sense do you think the class has made of Shakespeare/the play? What makes you think that? What did you want them to get out of it? How much of the playscript/text itself do you aim to read in class – with this class?

- The Shp in Schools project advocated an active, drama-based approach to the teaching of Shakespeare – are you familiar with this work (eg Rex Gibson) and how do you rate it as a methodology? Do you feel comfortable using these methods?

- In an ideal world what should the teaching of Shakespeare be like in your view/ how assessed? What are the constraints/advantages of SATs/GCSE as currently constructed?

- **Resources:** I notice you're using X edition in class – is that your choice/the departments? Why?

- How do you plan to use film/TV adaptations in your Shakespeare teaching? Theatre visits?

- In what year is Shakespeare first taught in the department? Why? Has it ever been discussed since you have been in the department?

Appendix E: Student Group Interview - semi-structured interview schedule

- Have you enjoyed doing Shakespeare? Best bits of the play? Other comments?
- Best lessons?
- Is Macbeth like anything you have read before?
- Why do you think Shakespeare is in the National Curriculum?
- What kind of person do you think loves Shakespeare?
- Would you want to read some more Shakespeare in the future?

The SATs Test:

- What did you think of the test question? Hard/easy/just what you expected?
- What do you think the examiners were looking for in your answer?
- Did you need to know the whole story of Macbeth, or just the two set scenes?

Appendix F: Statements Game

This was used in student interviews as a starter activity. Each member of the group in turn drew a statement at random from a pile, read out the statement , gave their initial answer, then looked to others in the group to respond.

- Shakespeare is England's greatest ever writer
- Shakespeare was a genius
- It is useful in adult life to know some Shakespeare (even to be able to quote from his plays)
- Shakespeare should be in the National Curriculum
- Shakespeare is boring
- Studying Shakespeare is good for you

Appendix G: Teacher Questionnaire

Shakespeare Survey: Section A

Please consider each of the following statements and tick the 5 with which you most agree:

☐ Shakespeare is England's greatest writer

☐ Shakespeare's work conveys universal values

☐ Shakespeare's reputation as 'England's greatest writer' has been socially constructed over the centuries

☐ Shakespeare's plays are the work of a literary genius

☐ It is not possible to get a full understanding of any Shakespeare play without seeing a performance of it

☐ Shakespeare's plays are so rich that they can continue to generate fresh meanings from generation to generation

☐ As teachers we need to be critical of Shakespeare's iconic status

☐ Placing Shakespeare at the heart of the English curriculum is a way of providing young people from a variety of backgrounds/ethnicities with a common culture

☐ It is every child's right to have access to Shakespeare

☐ Knowing Shakespeare is the mark of a 'good' education

☐ There exists an undeniable canon of great literary works which has Shakespeare at its centre

☐ Great literature should be read for aesthetic reasons rather than for ideological purposes

☐ Shakespeare's plays contain important universal lessons about the human condition

☐ The most enjoyable part of studying Shakespeare's plays is an appreciation of the beautiful poetry/language

☐ Shakespeare is not timeless: the plays should always be placed in their social/historical/political context

☐ There is no such thing as a 'correct' reading of any play

☐ Shakespeare's plays are intensely political

☐ The most important/interesting aspect of Shakespeare's plays is character and characterisation

Section B: Teaching Shakespeare

Please tick yes/no to each of the following questions:

	yes	no
1. Should Shakespeare be compulsory in the National Curriculum?		
at Key Stage 3	☐	☐
at key Stage 4	☐	☐
2. How is Shakespeare best assessed?		
a) by externally set written test/exam	☐	☐
b) by teacher-set written test/timed essay	☐	☐
c) through (moderated) written coursework	☐	☐
d) orally (as is possible currently at GCSE)	☐	☐
e) through performance/drama etc	☐	☐

d) other……

3. When 'studying' Shakespeare with a KS3 or 4 class, is it necessary to read the whole play?	☐	☐

4. What teaching methods do you *commonly* use when teaching Shakespeare?

a) reading round the class	☐	☐
b) teacher reading	☐	☐
c) acting out scenes	☐	☐
d) role play, improvisation	☐	☐
e) teacher led question/answer	☐	☐
f) watching film/video versions	☐	☐
g) line by line annotation	☐	☐

other…….

Other comment?

Appendix H: Student Questionnaires

Shakespeare in School Survey

This survey is part of a research project looking into the teaching of Shakespeare in school. Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. (NB. This questionnaire is anonymous, so no-one can identify you from your answers).
Thank you.

yes **no**

1. Had you ever read any Shakespeare before you did Macbeth in class this year? ☐ ☐
If yes, what and when?.....

2. Did you ever find Macbeth difficult to understand? ☐ ☐
If so, what helped you to understand it?.....

3. What were your <u>favourite</u> ways of doing Macbeth in class? tick as many as you like

a) reading the play round the class ☐
b) the teacher doing the reading ☐
c) watching a film version ☐
d) listening to a tape/CD ☐
e) acting scenes out ☐
f) other drama work (eg hot-seating, role-play, freeze-frames) ☐
g) teacher explaining/asking questions at the front of the class ☐
h) taking notes/filling in charts etc ☐
i) other……

4. What was your <u>least favourite</u> type of activity when doing *Macbeth*?.....

……..

5. Have you ever been to the theatre to see a live performance of a Shakespeare play? ☐ ☐

6. Apart from older brothers or sisters, is there anyone at home who has read or seen any Shakespeare? ☐ ☐

Please give brief details……

Appendix I: Sample page of lesson transcript

Showing category codings by colour, and marginal annotation of descriptive codes

time	transcript	notes
Two minutes discussion	operation. I want to see some good discussion now where you ask each other, OK? One minute to find out in your group what you already know about the play Macbeth? Starting now. I'm coming round. [T circulates. Buzz of classroom discussion. T: [sitting back at front at keyboard, ready to pool info on IWB] OK hands up. What have you got in your groups. (2) There should be at least one hand up from each table by now. At least one hand on each table, because everybody has had a chance to find something out. Ok, let's start with Roger. Thank you. Roger: There are three witches and they're burying a hand (.) a hand on the beach (.) and T: OK, right (.) just a little warning here. This is (.) you watched the film, didn't you? (2) So this is a scene from the film. (2) There are things in the film which aren't necessarily part of the play. It's the director's interpretation of the play. Um (.) And I don't want to mislead you about what's in the play because of the way this director has interpreted it as a film. OK, so I tell you what I'm just going to do for now, [types up on board] 'there are three witches'. That'll do. OK, thank you for now. Next table. What do you know? Tunde: He gets killed. T: [types] 'He gets killed'. Fantastic. Next table. What do you know? (2) Right, what else have you got? Zach: [mutters] Er, nothing - T: Nothing? Erm, I'm sure you had at least two things that you realised you knew about Macbeth.	*T circulates – monitors rather than intervenes*

Appendix J: Transcription Conventions

T:	Teacher
S:	unidentified student speaking
[ ]	description of actions, or of manner
(.)	brief pause
(3)	three second pause
<u>Word underlined</u>	speaker's emphasis
-	dash at end of line and at the start of the next speaker indicates interruption or overlap
full stop.	A full stop at the end of a contribution denotes falling intonation at the end of a speaker's utterance
...	indicates some text has been omitted

Appendix K: Example of Coding Grid

Collated codes: Textual Authority (lesson transcripts)

	Ea 9 *4 lessons*	**Pa 9** *4 lessons*	**Ea 10** *3 lessons*	**Pa 10** *3 lessons*
Category codes/ descriptive codes	*Number of recorded incidents*	*Number of recorded incidents*	*Number of recorded incidents*	*Number of recorded incidents*
Au/repro	**11**	**13**	**16**	**27**
- passive role rder	0	0	2	5
- auth rding/T lit crit	11	13	12	23
- auth intention	0	1	1?	0
- audience as abstr notion	2	0	2	3
Au/expr	**11**	**4**	**3**	**11**
- 'real' chars	11	4	3	11
- real life/theme	2	0	0	1
Au/dec	**0**	**3**	**2**	**2**
- lang/feature spot	0	2	1	2
- quotation spot	2	1	1	0
Au/text	**6**	**9**	**6**	**5**
- list of chars/notes	0	1	0	1
- text notes/edn	1	3	0	2
- definitions	1	0	1	0
- as book not script	4	7	5	3

Appendix L: Department beliefs - Results of Teacher Questionnaires

Teacher questionnaires – statements attracting more than 40% positive support in either school

statement	Parkside % *n=7*	Eastgate % *n=5*
*Need to see a performance	86	100
*Fresh meanings each generation	42	80
*No correct reading	42	80
Every child's right	14	40
Universal values	57	20
Common culture	42	0
Universal lessons about humanity	42	0
Character is most important	42	0
Not timeless, place in context	0	40

Eastgate *n=5*	%
*Need to see a performance	100
*Fresh meanings each generation	80
*No correct reading	80
Rep is socially constructed	60
Every child's right	40
Not timeless, place in context	40

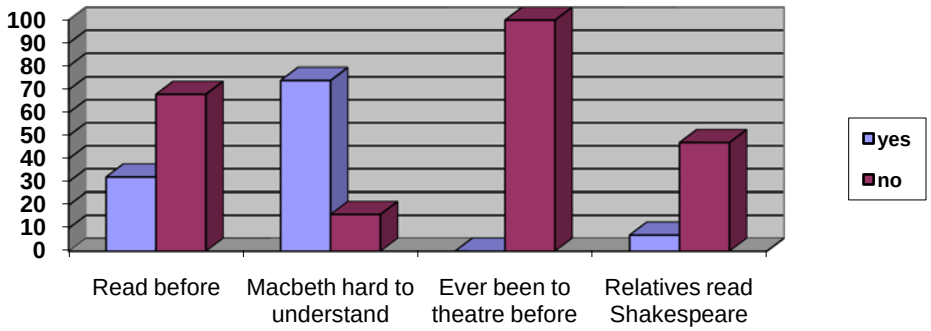
Parkside *n=7*	%
*Need to see a performance	86
Universal values	57
*No correct reading	42
Common culture	42
*Fresh meanings each generation	42
Universal lessons about humanity	42
Character is most important	42

* indicates the three statements each department has in common which attracted more than 40% positive response in both departments.

Appendix M: Results of Student Questionnaires

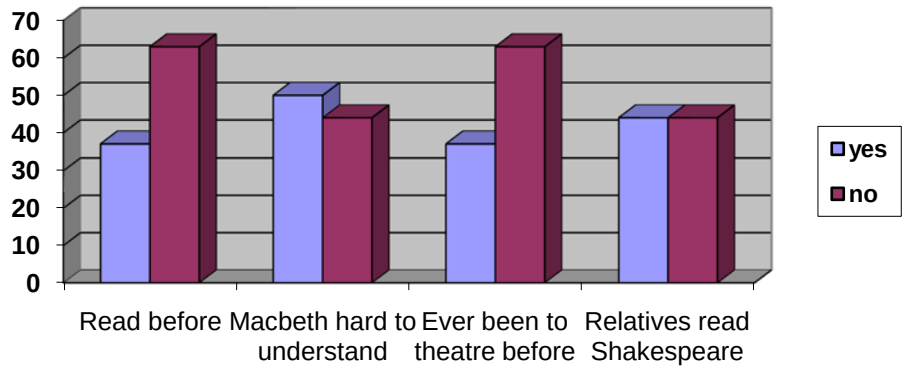
M1. Year 9 Parkside

Pa9	Read before	Macbeth hard to understand	Ever been to theatre before	Relatives read Shakespeare
yes	32%	74	0	7
no	68%	16	100	47



M2. Year 9 Eastgate

Ea9	Read before	Macbeth hard to understand	Ever been to theatre before	Relatives read Shakespeare
yes	37%	50	37	44
no	63%	44	63	44



Additional information given:

Have you ever read a Shakespeare play before? If so what?

Pa: Of the 6 students who had read a play before, 5 of these had read one in the latter years of primary school (*MND*, *Tempest* or *Macbeth*).
Ea: Of the 6 who answered yes, 5 mentioned *Hamlet* (possibly read in yr 8?); 1 states 'can't remember'.

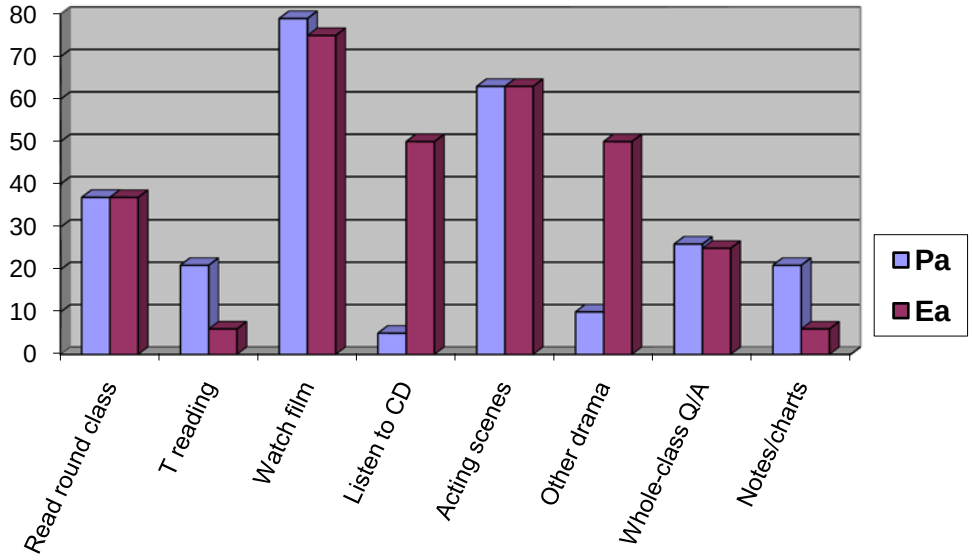
Did you find Macbeth difficult to understand? If so, what helped you to understand it?

Pa: the theatre-in-education group (x4); the teacher (x4); the film (x2); being given notes (x2); talking in groups (x1); rereading bits (x1)
Ea: the teacher (x3); discussing in groups (x2); thinking; the film; rereading bits; a dictionary; 'the meanings to the language'; revision aids

M3. Question 3 - Favourite ways of doing Macbeth comparing Eastgate and Parkside

Question 3: favourite ways of 'doing Macbeth' in class?

	Read round class	T reading	Watch film	Listen to CD	Acting scenes	Other drama	Whole-class Q/A	Notes/ charts
Pa	37%	21	79	5	63	10	26	21
Ea	37%	6	75	50	63	50	25	6



Additional information given:

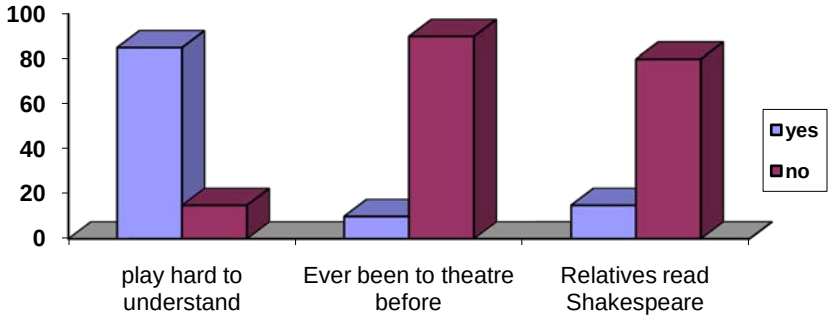
What was your least favourite type of activity when doing Macbeth?

Pa: reading the play/'the book' round class (x6); silent reading (x 3); going back over set scenes (x2); 'doing essays on small questions'; T asking questions at the front; listening to the T; T doing the reading; watching the film; writing about it.

Ea: essay writing (x2); charts and essays (x2); 'having to write it all down'; reading parts; reading; explaining the play; T asks questions at the front; watching the film; doing the tests; revising; drama things.

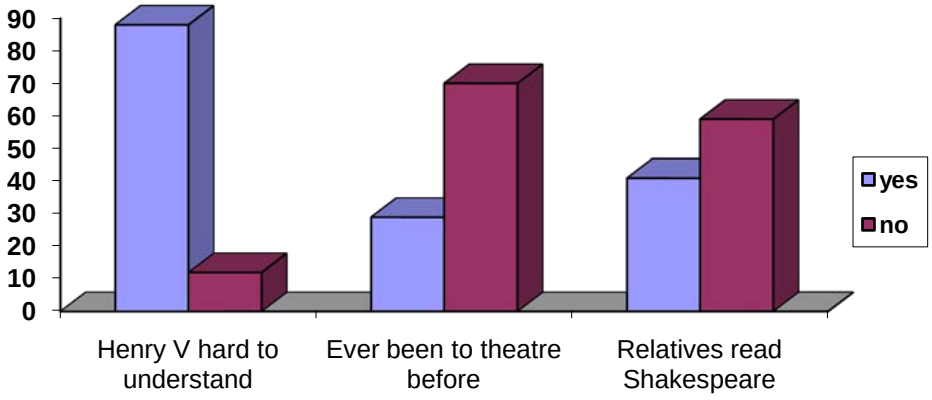
M4. Parkisde year 10

Pa10	R&J hard to understand	Ever been to theatre before	Relatives read Shakespeare
yes	85%	10	15
no	15%	90	80



M5. Eastgate year 10

Ea10	Henry V hard to understand	Ever been to theatre before	Relatives read Shakespeare
yes	88	29	41
no	12	70	59



Additional information given:

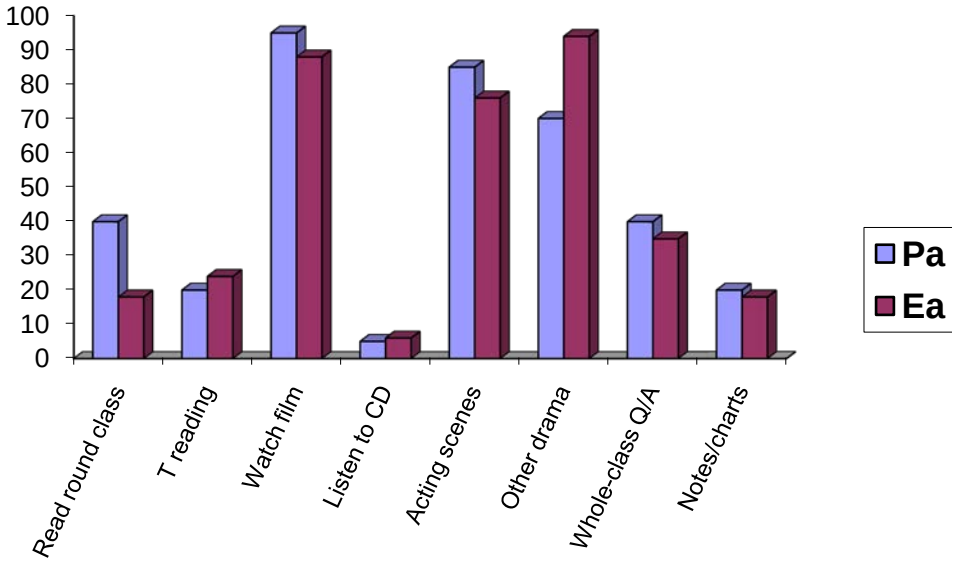
Did you find R&J/Henry V difficult to understand? If so, what helped you to understand it?

Pa: drama/role play (x3); the teacher (x3); the film (x2); simplified version (x1); class discussion (x1); internet (x1); books (x1); "old English" (x1)

Ea: drama/role play (x5); the teacher (x4); discussion (x3); watching the film (x3); "performing" (x1); "understanding the language" (x1)

M6. Favourite ways of 'doing the play' in class? Comparing Eastgate and Parkside

	Read round class	T. reading	Watch film	Listen to CD	Acting scenes	Other drama	Whole-class Q/A	Notes/ charts
Pa	40%	20	95	5	85	70	40	20
Ea	18%	24	88	6	76	94	35	18



Additional information given:

What was your least favourite type of activity when doing R&J/Henry V?

Pa: reading the play (x5); teacher reading (x4); taking notes (x4); writing essay (x2); doing drama (x2); collecting quotes; filling in charts; understanding the language

Ea: writing the essay (x4); T asking questions (x3); understanding the language (x2); T reading aloud (x2); watching film; "explaining things"; doing drama